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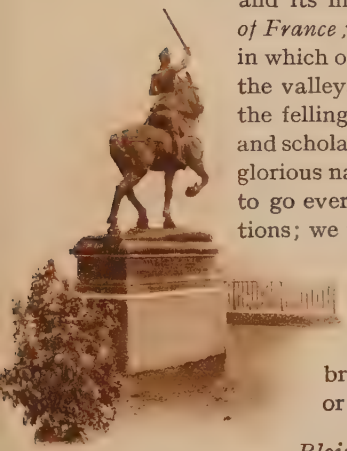
Blois. View of the Loire from the Château.

INTRODUCTION

Je suis né et ai esté noury jeune au
jardin de France, c'est Touraine.
RABELAIS.

I do not know whether it was Rabelais who first gave to Touraine and its immediate surroundings the name of the *Garden of France;* in his day this region really was a wooded park in which opened those broad, flowery clearings which were the valleys of the Loire and of its tributaries. Nowadays the felling of the woods has left the uplands almost bare, and scholars would deprive this favoured land of its old and glorious name. But we are not scholars, we do not profess to go everywhere, or to go to the bottom of these questions; we would forget the damp *brennes*, the arid *champagnes*, the Gâtine with its poor soil, and even the Beauce, which is all too flat; and we would see only the valleys. These are indeed as fair as in the days of Rabelais, — these wide, bright clearings, watered by streams, blue, green or brown, dotted with trees and flowers, and fringed



Blois. Statue of Joan of Arc.

with sumptuous dwelling-houses. Here we find no convulsions of nature, no giddy chaos of mountains, no mighty rivers in which dreaming cities bathe the rosy foundations of their palaces. The Loire is no Ganges, still less the Cher, the Indre,the Vienne and the Loir. But, better than this, the valleys of Touraine show us in little all that grace and restraint which belong above all to France.

The majestic course of the Loire, the graceful leafy arbours of the Indre or the Loir, the tender light infused with a lively and ethereal gaiety, the inhabitants with their welcoming smile and open frankness, everything recalls to us, everything murmurs in our ear : " Here is sweet France, here is kindly France ! " And I remember the emotion which seized me one day, on hearing an Englishman say to me : " I do not know which I like better here, France or the French. "

We are indeed in the heart of France. In Orleans, Blois, even in Saumur, are welded together the north and the south; the Ile-de-France, Burgundy, Dauphiny, Aquitaine, Armorica and Normandy are fused in one. As far back as Roman days, important roads converged there. Orleans was in early days the chief point of junction of the roads leading to Paris from the south-east and south-west, and, on the other hand, formed the bulwark of the southern lands against barbarian invasions coming from the east. Similarly, Tours was the meeting-place of important roads, and the rock against which broke the flood of Saracen invasion. The situation of Tours did more for the fame and fortune of the shrine of St. Martin than did its own sanctity.

The French kings very soon recognised the importance of these western marches for the security of their possessions. Charlemagne enriched Tours, Philip Augustus contested keenly with the Plantagenet kings the possession of the lands on the banks of the Loire, and it may be said that the Hundred Years' War was virtually ended on the day when the royal power over the Orléanais, Touraine and Anjou was restored. When the security of the kingdom had been established by conquest, the valley of the Loire became the chosen land of Louis XI, Charles VIII, Louis XII, Francis I, and their successors down to Henry III. The old donjons, the feudal walls were pierced with windows and adorned by carvings; French elegance called to its aid Italian grace, and harmonious châteaux arose, adorned like lovely women.

To-day there are no more kings; the great sanctuaries are no longer crowded by the faithful; the pilgrims of Compostella no longer pray round churches marked with the cockle-shell of St. James. And yet the Garden of France has lost none of its charm or attractiveness. These are

of another order, that is all. The pilgrims of to-day seek in the valleys of Touraine the historic savour of this earth so often watered with generous blood, and of this river, once so full of life, on which innumerable boats went by with sails spread wide; — that "majesty of ships" at which La Fontaine marvelled. They also seek in them an impression of those aspects of nature which are not grand, but delicate, soft and restrained. They find in them the memory of great writers and artists, who were born or lived in this privileged land : Gregory and Alcuin at Tours, Rabelais at Chinon and La Devinière, Joachim du Bellay at " le petit Lire ", Ronsard at La Poissonnière, at Vendôme and at Saint-Côme-lès-Tours, Racan at La Roche-Racan, Descartes at La Flèche, Alfred de Vigny at Loches, Honoré de Balzac in the valley of the Indre, at Tours, Saumur and Vendôme, Paul-Louis Courier at Véretz, Anatole France at La Béchellerie. They still admire that unparalleled wealth of churches, monasteries, castles, private houses and monuments of every style and age, Celtic, Gallo-Roman, Roman, Gothic, Renaissance, and of the classic and romantic epochs. And finally, they enjoy pleasures which are more immediate and less intellectual, though delicate enough; the wines of Touraine and Anjou, and all those pleasures of the table, the "*harnois de gueule*", which add a seasoning of delicate pleasure to the travels of every civilised man.

If one wishes to discover the incomparable charm of this land, one must be a tourist with leisure, who is glad to muse along the valley-bottoms. If one is pressed for time, it is better to see little, and see it well, than to see everything and see it badly. Besides, the valleys of Touraine are a dish that can be served in slices, valley by valley : from Gien to Chaumont; the heart of Touraine, from Amboise to Langeais, with the valleys of the Cher and the Indre; the valley of the Vienne and the Loire of Anjou; and lastly, the valley of the Loir. All these are journeys which can be made separately, and yet form a whole.

Every means of locomotion is possible. The railway passes near to every place which has to be visited, but it is not sufficient in itself for the happiness of the tourist. Good legs will very well supplement what it cannot give. For those who are less pressed for time, the bicycle or the motor are the ideal means of conveyance. They give the traveller more elasticity in the choice of his route, and that complete independence without which no travel is really fruitful to the intelligence.

The route I have followed in the present volume is not that usually followed by guides, who are obliged to combine all means of locomotion. Mine is intended for bicyclists and motorists who are not in a hurry. Leaving Orleans, it descends the Loire as far as Chaumont,

turns aside into the western part of the Sologne, descends the Cher as far as Chenonceaux, rejoins the Loire at Amboise and follows it as far as Langeais, goes up the Indre from Ussé to Loches, turning aside to visit the valley of the Indrois, arrives in the valley of the Vienne after crossing the picturesque plateau of Sainte-Maure and after that hardly leaves the valley of the Loire from Montsoreau to Angers. Finally it goes up the valleys of the Maine and the Loir, and stops at Châteaudun. But it can easily be broken off at Amboise in order to reach Montoire and Lavardin by Châteaurenault; or else at Tours, rejoining the Loir at Couture by way of La Roche-Racan; but not forgetting Luynes, Langeais, Ussé, Chinon, Azay-le-Rideau and Villandry; it is also possible to break it off at Saumur and strike the Loir at Le Lude, by way of Jalesne, or, better still, at Durtal or La Flèche, by way of Landifer and Baugé.

I have thus preserved the advantage of not writing a guide, which dictates a particular itinerary, but of attempting a modest essay, which suggests rather than describes. And I leave the tourist so many things to discover for himself, that, while wandering in the walks of the Garden of France, he may pluck himself, and for himself alone, flowers whose perfume he will enjoy all the better for having found them without the aid of a book.

Château of Chenonceaux.

Sunset on the Loire at Orleans.

CHAPTER I

—

Down the Loire from Orleans to Chaumont. In the Sologne.

The entrance to the Garden. — Before the gate of the Garden lies Orleans, softly sleeping, and dreaming of Joan of Arc. On all sides the memory of the Maid obsesses the memory irresistibly. It flourishes in the charming museum in the Rue du Tabour, it clings to the old houses of the town, and mourns before the poor statues of the heroine, or over the chilly crowns on the towers of the Cathedral of Sainte-Croix. But

Orleans. The Cathedral Towers.

it is a healthy air which blows there : beneath the stone bridge, the Loire mingles its grey waters with the golden sands.

No detail of the landscape, taken by itself, has anything which arrests our admiration : the lazy waters drag themselves with difficulty, in summer, amidst banks of sand, covered with sparse vegetation; the very banks are formed by a high, monotonous embankment, raised to protect the low-lying plain from floods. And yet a mysterious charm enfolds the broad river-bed, stately yet not sad, the broad lines, calm but not lifeless, of the winding banks, the well-designed masses of great trees which slope gently down to the river; and this charm is above all due to the delicate light diffused from a limpid sky, and bathing all things in softness and joy.

In the midst of the neighbouring plain, on the bank of a river coming from the Sologne, which runs parallel with the Loire for a long time before falling into it, Cléry raises its beautiful basilica, simple and white. It was Louis XI who rebuilt it, and said his prayers at the feet of the Virgin of the place, a naive and charming old statue carved in oak-wood blackened by time. An ugly, heavy mantle of white satin covers it, hiding the graceful pose of Our Lady, who, with her long fingers, at once upholds

and offers for the future sacrifice a dimpled Jesus with plump cheeks and curly hair.

Cléry has the charm of those places as yet untainted by fashion and snobbery. The touch of austerity in the forms of its basilica, the simplicity and lightness of its nave, its transept, short, but elegant and slender, make it one of the purest symbols of faith in the xvth century. But to its right — like the smile of a young novice amid a grave chapter of monks — shines the little, delicately ornamented chapel, beneath which sleep the brothers of Pontbriant, together with several deans of the ancient collegiate church turned by the favour of Louis XI into a chapel royal. Near by, in another chapel, less richly flamboyant, but elegant in its simplicity and sober in its adornment, rests Dunois, the Bastard of Orleans, the companion of Joan of Arc.

Tomb of Louis XI at Cléry.

In the Chapel of Longueville at Cléry.

In the nave, on the left, looking towards the horrible modern altar upon which is enthroned the lovely miracle-working Virgin, the tomb of Louis XI rises upon four marble columns. Michael Bourdin, who carved it in 1622, has portrayed the King praying, surrounded by four little figures. Below it a few steps descend to the vault, and we may still take in our hands the King's massive skull, once filled with such great cunning,

but also with such a passion for the unity of the kingdom of France.

Cléry is built away from the river, thus forming an exception in this region, where all life comes from the river, or the streams which empty themselves into it. In the Middle Ages the safest way was by water. Centres of some importance, the most prosperous abbeys, the most powerful castles, fringe, dominate or command the river itself, or the bridge crossing it. Near Cléry, Meung-sur-Loire ranges its light-coloured houses and its blue roofs tier above tier at the water's edge. It grew up round an abbey, to which its founder, St. Liphard, a count of Orleans in the VIth century, bequeathed his name. The little town seems to have retained, from its first origins and from the college of canons which replaced the abbey, a taste for the calm, quiet and silent life of the cloister; the character of the land, simple without aridity, is symbolised by its church, in which the earliest Gothic shows once more that, in architecture, proportion and line are the essential things, and ornament but an idle fussiness which too often conceals poverty of thought.

Basilica of Cléry.

It is not very far from Meung to Beaugency, and the two towns have almost the same number of inhabitants. But at Beaugency one is conscious of an intenser throb of life than at Meung. Yet it is the same road commanding the Loire which runs through both places. No doubt. But the cross-roads descending to the river are not of the

The Collegiate Church at Meung-sur-Loire.

same order. At Meung, the suspension-bridge is of recent date; and its history is that of the coachmen who drive over it, or the pretty girls whose hair is ruffled by the wind as they pass across. At Beaugency, an ancient stone bridge, with many a wound, displays its gaunt loins with their badly-healed scars. Up to the XIXth century, the bridge of Beaugency was the only one that crossed the Loire between Orleans and Blois; and this explains the importance of the town as guardian of the bridge and advanced sentinel, now of the Counts of Blois, now of the Dukes of Orleans. And so, not far from the bridge, there still watches the enormous mass of an irregularly-shaped keep, nowadays dismantled, which is called the Tour de César, but recalls in reality the memory of the Caesar of Anjou, Fulk Nerra. Other remains of fortifications tell of the military past of the place, the deeds of violence which marked its sieges, and the deeds of horror when it was sacked. La Noue, the " Iron Arm " *(Bras de Fer)* of the Protestants, the companion of Henry IV, reminds us that the soldiers of his day made war for its own sake, and not for the sake of a principle. One fine day in July, 1562, the troops of

the Reformed religion broke into the town and committed rape upon both Calvinist and Catholic women, Provençal, Gascon and Frenchman " vying with each other in their efforts, as if a prize had been offered for him who should do the worst ". Ten years later, the Catholics did just the same.

The Bridge of Beaugency.

The stones have now worn down, like the passions of the time. The charming, harmonious Town Hall shelters a pacific administration. An ancient rampart has become a fine terrace with four rows of trees, a triumphal avenue leading to the Loire, which gleams at the foot of a somewhat steep slope. The old castle of the Sires of Beaugency, rebuilt by Dunois, contains a poor-house; and the delightful garden of the civil hospital is now no longer disturbed save by the soft, furtive step of the good sisters.

Chambord. — When one leaves the banks of the Loire at Muides or Saint-Dyé, one soon meets, as one goes southwards, with a grim wall, through which the road passes. It can be closed by a gate; and the lodge of the gate-keeper opposite proves that one is entering private property. The road then turns into a fine park drive, beside which sport the rabbits

Château of Chambord.

from the warren, and across which scuttle long-tailed pheasants, bursting in their brilliant plumage from out of the undergrowth. This park of more than twelve thousand acres was once a royal domain. It is still the property of a prince, and serves as a setting for one of the jewels of French architecture — Chambord.

Like Versailles, it was first a shooting-box, which Theobald the Trickster *(le Tricheur)*, Count of Blois, had built in the xth century in this vast forest. Six centuries later, the whim of Francis I built an enormous château there. A whim, assuredly, for the site has little charm : it is at the extremity of the

Beaugency. The Hôtel de Ville.

Château of Chambord.

dismal Sologne, in poor woodland country, through which flows a sluggish streamlet, the Cosson. But game is always abundant; and its solitude is tempered by the presence of Blois some ten miles away, and the Loire at barely a third of the distance. And, without any intention of his own, the King produced a romantic contrast by causing an enchanted palace to arise in this sombre land.

Whether Dominic of Cortona, called Il Boccador, was the architect, or Jacques Sourdeau and his son Denis; whether the Italian influence is stronger than the French, is a question for the dissertations of archaeologists. As a matter of fact, neither the artist nor the tourist would

Chambord. A Balustrade

Chambord. The Lantern.

On the roof at Chambord.

dream of asking themselves the question when faced with this colossal marvel : the surprise of the unexpected excludes all other thoughts. Is it an old stronghold, the battlements of which have been razed in order to crown the central keep with an elegant lantern, and the towers and buildings with pointed roofs, elongated dormer-windows and tall chimneys? No; for the whole has been harmoniously conceived and planned. The same mind built the walls, flanked the corners with enormous towers, and raised the high-pitched roofs. Even the coldly formal gallery which closes the court-yard, added under Louis XIV, hardly succeeds in making the general impression one of heaviness.

Inside there is the same impression of elegance on a vast scale. In the middle of an immense vestibule shaped like a Greek cross, rises a

Park of Chambord from the Castle roof.

curious staircase in the form of two concentric spirals, so ingeniously disposed, that two persons can go up and down it respectively without meeting each other. This staircase and the great vestibule lead to all the apartments, now deserted and almost unfurnished; they lead, in particular, to the marvel of Chambord : the roof. Above the staircase, with its double spiral, rises a light and finely decorated lantern one hundred feet high. From this lantern, as a central point of union, set out the four principal streets of a dream city, built on a terrace at a height of some eighty feet above the ground. For it is indeed a strange little city, with low walls, long windows, high-pitched, steeply-sloping roofs and disproportionate chimneys, all decorated with carvings, — a little overloaded perhaps, but always charming, — which add so greatly to the fantastic impression of the place, that one forgives their occasional lack of taste. Everything in defiance of good sense appears so natural among these fairy-like altitudes !

On the roof at Chambord.

As our surprise dies down, and our amazement becomes blunted, they are succeeded by astonishment at seeing such spacious walks and such rich carvings. For the sober decoration of the interior of the château

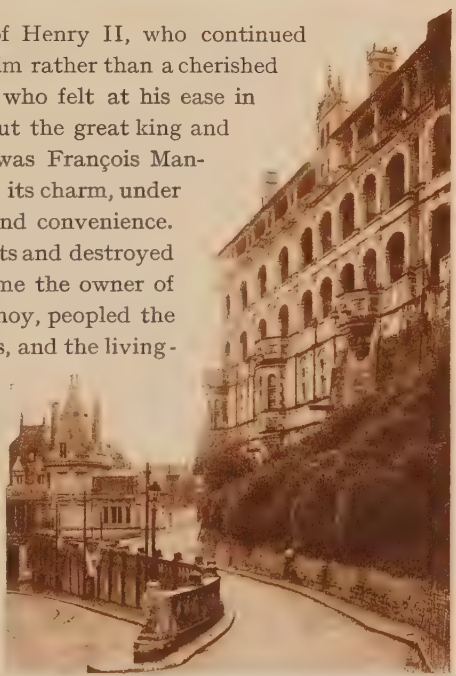
has been abruptly succeeded by an incredible richness of ornament. What is the reason of all these smiling faces on the roofs? One's glance wanders across the balustrades of the alur, or rampart walk, towards the country, over the rounded heads of the trees, over the forest drives which open out before us, over the neighbouring clearings; and the mystery is at once made plain. The castle was built for the hunting season, and its beautiful roof is a belvedere. The king's gallantry offered this compensation to the ladies : while he went his way in the park with a grand turnout of horses, dogs, trumpeters and boar-spears, the beauties of the court and their merry train amused themselves with looking on from the terraces on high, — amidst the graces of chubby little Loves and the charm of sculptured foliage and interwoven devices — at the pursuit of stags with branching antlers or of some grand old boar. So vivid is the dreamlike impression that we instinctively wait for the splendid train to pass by. Alas for the fleeting illusion! The deserted forest stretches away to the horizon, and the château through which we retrace our steps is cold, sad and dead.

Chambord. The Grand Staircase.

Chambord is full of the desolation of a beautiful thing badly finished, spoilt without remedy by the hand of man. Once the caprice was satisfied

Blois. Bridge over the Loire.

of Francis I, who planned it, and of Henry II, who continued it, the enchanted palace became a victim rather than a cherished friend. It still charmed Louis XIV, who felt at his ease in these surroundings worthy of him. But the great king and his architects — first among whom was François Mansart — stripped the beautiful house of its charm, under the pretext of adding to its beauty and convenience. Stanislas Leszczynski filled in the moats and destroyed the gardens. Marshal Saxe, who became the owner of Chambord after his victory at Fontenoy, peopled the servant's quarters with his old soldiers, and the living-rooms with women. After him, neither Louis XV, who resumed possession of the domain, nor Louis XVI came to live in it. Little by little time left scars upon it, which the Revolution increased by selling the furniture, stripping the lead from the terraces, and giving up the buildings to the local peasants,



Château of Blois. The Francis I façade.

Château of Blois. The Façade of Louis XII.

or the Polish and Austrian prisoners drafted into the neighbourhood. Napoleon turned it into a barracks, then gave it to his beloved Berthier, Prince of Wagram and Neufchâtel. Finally, in 1821, it was presented by public subscription to the Duke of Bordeaux, who took from it the title of Count of Chambord. His heirs, the Princes of Parma, have dutifully kept up the costly house, to which still clings the melancholy of mourning for a dead royalty and a Restoration which miscarried.

Blois. — Blois should be approached from the embankment on the left bank of the Loire if one would embrace its picturesque beauty in a single glance. It was thus that La Fontaine saw it, as he was riding in a coach from Paris towards the Limousin. This poet, who saw things with such a perceiving eye, at a period when hardly anybody looked at them, was charmed by this amphitheatre of houses, and declares the town to be " very beautiful ". He compares it to a crescent, the horns of which are formed by the church of Saint-Solenne (which has since become the cathedral) and the castle. Although the mass of houses has increased since the XVIIth century, the fabulist's comparison still holds good. Blois

is still dominated on the left by the mass of the château, on the right by the terraces of what used to be the episcopal palace.

Few cities have a more gracious and charming aspect. The majestic, slow-flowing Loire forms as it were a pedestal of limpid water beneath the city, crossed by a fine, " assbacked " bridge, a masterpiece of Jacques-Jules Gabriel. Along the edge of the water, a long line of houses is crowned by a jumble of roofs, and other roofs rise tier above tier to the top of the precipitous wall of the valley. Is it the pretty confusion of these blue roofs, interspersed with white walls and fresh green vegetation, is it the soft curve of the Loire, which seems to form part of the architectural scheme, is it the delicate light throwing a fine silvery sheen over the landscape, which make this town so enchanting? All this indeed, but also the accumulated historic memories of pomp, glory and battle. Blois is the most French of all the towns of France.

It was Blois which dominated the most ancient countship of the Carolingian realm. It was Blois which for nearly two hundred years witnessed the struggles of its Counts Palatine with the French kings, whom they equalled in might. Charles of Orleans, on his return from captivity, held his court

Château of Blois. The main entrance.

Château of Blois. The Courtyard.

Gateway to the Queen's Apartments.

here — a modest court, for he was poor and wore his robes patched. But this " Realm of Indolence " (" *royaume du nonchaloir* ") welcomed poets to its intimacy, and offered them, in place of plenteous cheer, fine books and polished language; while Dunois, the prince's bastard brother, watched from the fortress. Blois makes its entry into official history with the son of Charles of Orleans, — now become King Louis XII, — and with Francis I. This is its period of glory and gaiety, which witnessed an almost entire reconstruction of the castle. Later on, the Wars of Religion stained with blood the steets of the town, and even the marble pavements of the palace. Gaston of Orleans, in the second quarter of the XVIth century, went on building, and

Blois. The Great Staircase.

died there. After that came oblivion and ruins, till we come to the XIXth century, the era of reverent restoration. But the memories which flutter about the halls and stairways now in the ancient abode of the Valois hardly know where they may settle. Save for a poor museum, lodged in the wing of Louis XII, and a rather fine library in that of Gaston of Orleans, the castle where Anne of Brittany died in the odour of sanctity, and Henry of Guise was assassinated, lies bare and stripped.

As soon as one enters Blois, what should one see first? I advise the terraces of the old episcopal palace, which show us a fresh aspect of the town, this time from above. As often as one can, one should gaze long and lovingly at a landscape before analysing its beauties. It is not often that the soul of things inhabits the curiosities visited by tourists. The clatter of visitors, the vulgarity of the guides, or, if one is alone, the vague melancholy which floats about unused dwelling-places, fill the air with a sort of boredom, — almost of hostility, — chill the imagination, and pain the heart. Far better, when possible, to breathe the subtle fragrance arising from the shady roads, floating round the pointed gables,

Blois. The Gallery of Louis XII.

or escaping from the old towers on the wings of the crows, or in the vibrations of the bells. And since Blois has this rare privilege, let us profit by it.

On every side, streets formed of steps (for Blois is the city of stairways) lead up to the Place St. Louis, at the far side of which rises the huge and undistinguished cathedral church. To the right, a little behind it, the old episcopal palace, built by Jacques-Jules Gabriel, displays its simple lines, and its combined strength and elegance of proportion. Beyond it, lime trees and chestnuts cast their shade over a lovely, peaceful terrace. The noises of the town rise up to it, filtering through the light air, and add life to the fine landscape. House talks to house across the narrow streets, and one can almost hear the murmur of the Loire below; while at the far edge of the plain the sombre green of the Forest of Russy and the Park of Chambord seems heavy with silence. No violent irregularities break the horizon, no upheavals of nature, but at our feet lies a pretty town, provincial but noble, a broad, lazy stream, and, beyond it, a valley of fields and woods, with long straight roads planted with trees leading towards the horizon.

Blois. The Louis XII Wing.

Having fortified our hearts and spirits by the picturesque side of Blois, let us start upon its historic side : its château. On one side of the Place Victor-Hugo, the outer façade of the wing built by Francis I stands

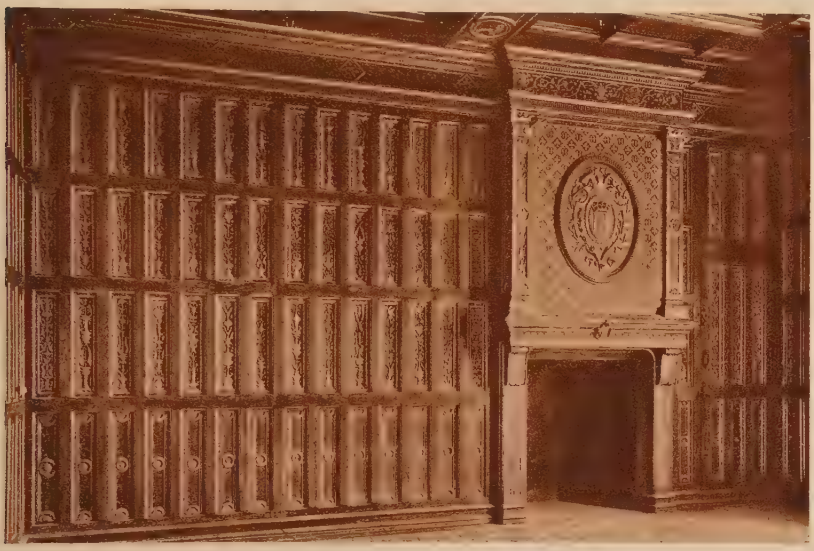
Blois. The Salamander Chimney-piece.

firm upon those lofty, solid stone foundations which long ago in the Middle Ages were bathed by the moat. Above these rise two storeys with arcaded galleries in the Italian style, and beneath the roof a charming open gallery, supported by light columns. This elegant, sober façade is already almost classic. But a part of the wing of Gaston of Orleans, built beside it, gives us an example of how easily a residence full of gay and lightsome fancy can be turned into a dull building, merely by arranging exactly similar elements in a perfectly symmetrical order.

Let us turn eastward, along the foot of these old walls, and then go up a few steps. On the right, at the end of a long open space, is seen the calm front of a house of brick and stone, one storey high, with mullioned windows, above which rises a high-pitched roof in which dormer-windows, large and small, alternate. It might be the town residence of some noblemen at the close of the Gothic period. Towards the centre, a little to the right, a solid door with a round arch is divided into compartments by columns

Blois. Chimney-piece of the Grande Salle des Gardes (or Salle du Conseil).

adorned with fleurs de lis. Above it, a large square niche, framed in delicate architectural ornaments, contains a modern statue of a crowned horseman. This door must surely lead into the house of some mighty baron; and all at once we learn, from the fleurs de lis carved in profusion on the



Blois. Henry III's Cabinet.

columns and the background of the niche, the symbolic porcupine, and the initials L and A carved in relief over the lilies of France and the ermines of Brittany, that the lords and masters of this house were the King of France, Louis XII, and Anne of Brittany, his wife.

Passing through the arch, a fine courtyard, in the form of a huge rectangle, presents a valuable object lesson, with its perfect examples of French architecture from the XIIIth to the XVIIth centuries. The Tour de Châteaurenault (with its *oubliettes*), and the fine hall of the Estates date from John I, Count of Blois, a contemporary of Philip Augustus. In 1503 Louis XII completed the sober one-storeyed dwelling which surmounts a gallery running at right angles and looking on to the courtyard through its elegant elliptical arches.

Blois. Henry III's Oratory.

The ancient feudal castle was transformed under Francis I, between 1516 and 1523, by Jacques Sourdaud and his son Denis, whom we have already met at Chambord; and traces of it are still to be seen in certain parts of his sumptuous dwelling. The famous newel staircase, constructed within an open octagonal tower, finely carved, leads up to the apartments occupied by the last of the Valois. On the first floor, the enigmatic character of Catherine de' Medici leaves an uneasy memory; and we are glad when the guardian, with a sudden gesture, throws open the window to the pure outside air; so strongly does her Italian cunning cling to the delicate panelling of carved oak, which, opening to a skilful pressure of the hand or foot, reveals her secret cupboards. Other memories then rise before us. It was from this same window, out of which we are leaning, that Marie de' Medici, imprisoned by her son Louis XIII, slipped out a rope and escaped. Beneath the castle, in the old moat, and before us, in the place now occupied by the hideous modern quarter leading to the station, lovely gardens, now entirely vanished, used to stretch away to the forest of Blois. Nothing is left of them save a charming little building

Blois. Salle des Etats.

which used to adorn them, and has kept the name of Anne of Brittany's Pavilion. In its high-pitched roof the queen might recognise the shape of the caps worn by the women of her land.

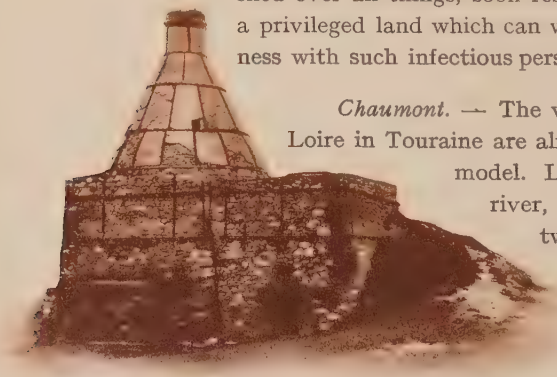
Above the apartments of Catherine de'Medici those of the King are laid out in the same order. There we are no longer haunted by the memory of Italian poison and feminine intrigues, but by that of a base murder. In the very chamber of Henry III, while the royal murderer listened in the neighbouring room, the boldest of the Forty-five fell on the Duke of Guise, who, pierced by blows from their swords and daggers, fell at the foot of the King's bed. There his great body lay for two hours, covered with a grey mantle, on which was placed a cross of straw. Then they burnt it, in a hall on the ground floor of the castle, and the ashes were cast into the Loire.

These places are indeed haunted by terrible ghosts. The palace of Gaston of Orleans is at least unstained by crime; but it remained unfinished. At the entrance, beneath the stately cupola constructed by François Mansart, the staircase was never built. And indeed, the circular colonnade

Château of Chaumont. The Entrance.

on the ground-floor, and the coldly classical façade looking on to the court of honour, in spite of the undoubted strength of their design, do not cause us to regret that death prevented Gaston of Orleans from pulling down the castles of Francis I and Louis XII.

Before we leave this castle, with its varying moods, at once charming and terrible, let us dream awhile on the long terrace overlooking the Loire. The pretty town, the fine river, the calm horizon, the tender light shed over all things, soon restore our balance. It is indeed a privileged land which can win us to indulgence and mildness with such infectious persuasiveness !



Chaumont. — The villages upon the banks of the Loire in Touraine are almost all built upon the same model. Low houses stretch along the river, in the narrow space left between the river-embankment and the abrupt fall of the limestone cliff. In this

In Sologne.

On the Terrace of Chaumont looking towards the Loire.

tuffeau, or micaceous chalk, the peasants have often hollowed out their troglodytes' dwellings, or, oftener still, their cellars. Above the houses, the church raises its pointed spire, and on the heights above, a nobleman's dwelling-house uplifts its towers, or sometimes, in less feudal wise, extends its white walls and roofs of blue slate.

Such is Chaumont, formed of one long street running along the left bank of the Loire, while the haughty mass of the castle crushes, at it were, the edge of the hill. A cool, shady road, clinging to the side of the hill, leads up from the village street to the edge of the plateau, running along the side of a fine park and garden, which are shaded at the entrance by flourishing cedars.

Chaumont must be reckoned among those houses which are still half feudal in plan and appearance, but are really intended chiefly for the pleasure of the owner. The defences are reduced to a moat, — not of a very developed type, — a drawbridge, and blind walls rising to a considerable height, just sufficient to protect the dwelling-house from a surprise attack. In fact, the lord felt it to be enough to prevent everybody from coming in and out of his house as if it were a public resort.

Chaumont. The Courtyard.

Chaumont. A Corner Tower.

The present castle was begun about 1473, on the ruins of an ancient castle, by Charles I of Chaumont-Amboise, and continued by his son, Charles II, the nephew and collaborator of the famous Cardinal George d'Amboise. In 1560, it was bought by Catherine de' Medici. But, with its grim towers and its courtyard, at that time still closed in on every side, Chaumont was not the house to please a woman; and Catherine soon forced Diane de Poitiers to exchange it with her for Chenonceaux. Diane did not keep her unwanted domain for long, and left it for graceful Anet. Many were the owners of Chaumont after the favourite. In 1739 one of them, Nicolas Bertin de Baugien, who had just obtained possession of it, opened up the inner court and made the terrace, from which there is such a beautiful view over the Loire. A little later the Le Ray family set up a manufactory of art pottery there, under the direction of the Italian Nini. Franklin visited the factory and castle; Madame de Staël lived in it during her period of disgrace. In the XIXth century it has been furnished and restored by the Comte d'Aramon and the Prince de Broglie.

The castle of Chaumont, when one sees it from the plain, takes on the grim aspect of a fortress, with its four great towers, its high machi-

colated battlements, and its austere drawbridge. But as we approach nearer, we notice a care for elegance and comfort, which is anything but military. Ornamented windows open in the outside wall, carved figures smile in stone. On the left-hand tower are the arms of the Cardinal d'Amboise; on the right-hand tower, those of his brother Charles I. Above the entrance gate are those of Louis XII, with the initials of the King and Queen Anne, his wife. Along the walls, on a level with the middle of the first row of windows, runs an elegant frieze, in which conventionalized volcanoes, emblems of the place (*chaud mont* — the burning mountain), alternate with the interlaced initials of the first owners, Charles of Chaumont-Amboise and Catherine of Chauvigny, his wife. Passing through the porch, one enters a quadrangular courtyard, the three wings of which "have, thank God, no symmetry!" as La Fontaine said of Blois. Two corner staircases in turrets frame a pretty gallery crowned by surbased arches. Above the three wings of the house, dormer-windows, roofs and pinnacles trace a picturesquely fantastic outline of varying forms and levels. The fourth side is more charming still, for it is nature herself. It opens on

Evening on the Loire at Chaumont.

Château du Moulin.

to the valley of the Loire, whose high embankment winds away into the distance, along the metallic mirror-like surface of the river, cut here and there by great sandbanks; above run the interminable, almost horizontal lines of the trees, deep green in the foreground, ultramarine on the horizon, beneath a sky of a pearly blue.

Chaumont is one of those residences which one loves to visit, for one feels that it has a soul. Not the soul of its former owners, whose very dust is dead, but that of its owners at the present day, whose presence one dimly divines, even when they are not there, by a warmer air, a subtle perfume or a fine mist, which one neither sees nor feels, but of which one is vividly conscious. Noth ng of them is visible, yet none the less it is of them that one thinks,

A Cottage of Sologne.

Château of Cheverny.

not of those (Catherine de' Medici, Ruggieri, Diane de Poitiers) whose favourite furniture adorned the rooms through which we passed. We perceive without any effort the presence of the soul of to-day; and before the memorials of past centuries, accumulated before our eyes, we find it hard to remember that those who have used and loved them have really lived.

In the Sologne. — Almost all the southern part of the department of Loir-et-Cher, to the south of the Loire, from the gates of Blois to Contres, Romorantin, Salbris, La Motte-Beuvron, forms a region apart in this country, with its generous welcome and smiling character. It is the Sologne, the land of heaths *(brandes)*, a mixture of wood, moor and lakes. Until recently life was hard here. On this soil of flat,

Hounds at Cheverny.

Cheverny. The King's Chamber.

sandy clay the water could neither run off nor filter through, and had formed an innumerable quantity of pools. On every side were sand, clay and water. On this poor soil flourished an equally poor vegetation; gorse and heather, with little woods of pine and birch around the pools. Communications were few or none, for the unstable soil turned every road into a quagmire. In these poverty-stricken surroundings mankind lived hard and did not multiply. Families were grouped into little country towns, wretched *locatures* made up of houses without windows, built of mud-bricks or *torchis*, — a paste of mud and chopped straw, — and thatched with reeds. The unhealthy damp made the peasants sickly, melancholy and suspicious. In this half desert region, eighty years ago, there was, on an average, hardly one inhabitant to every ten acres. Even in 1848 the Sologne was the land of fevers.

Cheverny. Gallery of the Dining Hall.

This peculiar type of country had its own special charm, consisting in its melancholy, and a curious lassitude. In the evening the sun, falling upon the light mists as they rose from the pools, gleamed more softly; at night the moon was more mysterious. And the fairies peopled this land of obscure legends and unknown terrors.

But game swarmed, for the inhabitants had little heart to disturb it. And so, from the Middle Ages onwards, the hunting attracted noblemen

Cheverny. The Guard Room.

or rich bourgeois to the Sologne, and the countryside became dotted with castles and country houses. Chambord, Beauregard near Cellettes, Cheverny, La Morinière, north of Mur-de-Sologne, Le Moulin, not far from Lassay-sur-Croisne, — to mention only the most celebrated.

To-day, this region has no longer the same mystery, or the same poverty. Little by little, in many places, the soil has been treated and the marshes drained. Agricultural chemistry has given the land the lime and phosphoric acid in which it was lacking. Good roads have been made, calling forth life on every hand. The countryside of the Sologne has been brightened up, and now there remain just enough gorse, heather, fields of buckwheat and pools (except in certain remote parts which have not yielded to treatment so well), to recall the former character of the Sologne and form good game-preserves. By the side of the road one can still see, as one goes by, coveys of partridges fly off with a noise like the rustle of silk, pheasants rising heavily, hares stretching their long muscles, larks singing as they mount straight into the sky, startled blackbirds hurrying off to other trees, or gaily-coloured hoopoes pointing their long beaks beneath their crests famous in fairy-stories.

Ruins of the Tower of the Château of Cinq Mars.

Poor but hospitable villages greet the traveller as he goes through; and it is really pleasant to go from Blois to Celles-sur-Cher by Cour-Cheverny and Mur-de-Sologne, or from Beaugency to Romorantin by way of La Ferté-Saint-Cyr, Dhuison, Montrieux, Neung-sur-Beuvron and Millançay. One still finds in these kindly villages, with their belfries like sugar-sticks which children carefully suck to a fine point, the good old inns of bygone days, hospitable and clean, where one eats as well as if one were at home, and sleeps in a bedroom of which the deal floor has been vigorously scrubbed. I remember one of these country hostelries at Cour, where our evening dinner was delicious under the roses of the little garden, in the shadow of a simple but charming church in the late Romanesque style, of which the bell-tower, with its high pointed cap, seemed to stare at us with the mocking eyes of its dormer-windows and the wide open mouth of its window.

The most famous castle in the Sologne (setting aside Chambord, of course) is Cheverny. In the village of this name, a long *place* leads up to a delightful little old church in no particular style, half surrounded by

a wooden porch and market-place, supported by beams of roughly-hewn oak. This peasant church gives shelter to its parishioners on market days. Almost opposite us, a simple iron gate opens into the park drive. Immediately on the left, we should just glance at the outbuildings : through an XVIIIth century gate, surmounted by a clock, we enter a vast rectangular court, flanked on three sides by low, regular stone buildings, with a fine brown-tiled roof. A tranquil spot, forming a perfect frame for the slow, stately movements of the horned beasts.

Leaving this farm on a monumental scale, we find a long lawn stretching up to the château. It is an immense, white stone building, without animation, in a Louis XIII style already verging on the classic. A one-storeyed, central pavilion is flanked, right and left, by two-storied pavilions with slate roofs shaped like quadrangular domes, *à l'impériale*, themselves ending in a sort of square belvedere. The only thing which breaks the flat façade slightly is a narrow pavilion with a single window, in the centre of the edifice. The rest of the front is desperately flat ! The monotony of the thirteen high windows with pediments on the first storey is only broken by a dozen oval niches, in which are placed twelve marble busts. This monotony does not lack a certain nobility, and the architect Boyer of Blois

Cheverny. The Church.

has succeeded in giving his handiwork an impression of bourgeois wealth.

The house is fine, spacious and comfortable, with a stately suite of apartments in the XVIIth century style. The Hurault family, who were later Hurault de Cheverny, belonged to the legal nobility, and their house bears the mark of this. Beneath the noble, striving after splendour, can still be detected the bourgeois. The Cheverny who built the castle in 1634 was only a viscount of a recent creation, granted to his father, who had been Chancellor under Henry III.

The only touch of fantasy in this fine interior is the gallery which leads to the dining-room, and the dining-room itself. A series of panels, from the brush of Jean Mosnier, an artist of Blois, relates, not without a certain provincial humour, the story of Don Quixote.

We must not fail to look out of doors. The artists of the XVIIth century always had an eye for a fine vista. Before us the road leads to Contres. Behind the castle, the eye is charmed by the park. In the centre of the garden front, a vast, finely proportioned lawn, framed in foliage, leads up to the orangery. There is nothing elaborate in form, nothing made of costly material in this corner; but the porportions are so harmoniously ordered, the greens, greys and whites are so delicately blended, that the general effect is a real pleasure to the eye and a delightful rest to the mind.

In Sologne.

Entrance Gates of the Château of Saint-Aignan.

CHAPTER II

The Valley of the Cher. The Loire of Touraine.

Banks of the Cher. — Between the southern edge of the Sologne and the last hills of Berri, the Cher has hollowed out its course by carrying off the surface soil and wearing away the soft rock. From Vierzon to its confluence with the Loire the river takes on an aspect characteristic of all the waterways of Touraine. In a limestone basin, with more or less precipitous edges, and more or less wide at the bottom, the water flows gently on, sometimes winding, sometimes with softly meandering bends. The bottom of the basin, piled with débris rendered fertile by moisture, has decked itself with verdure; meadows, willows, poplars and walnut trees. At its edges appears the pretty, fine limestone which gives their character to all these valleys of Touraine, and even to those of the Loir below **Châteaudun** and Vendôme. The rock sparkles gaily in the sun,

Selles-sur-Cher. The Church.

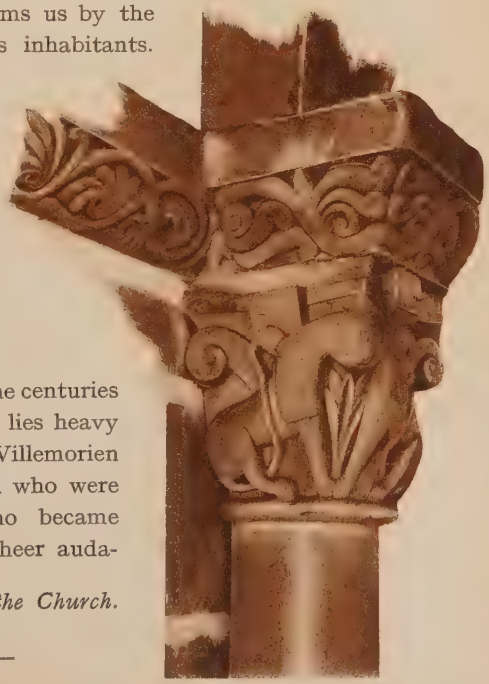
and drapes itself with thick vegetation, which often droops over the water, and always climbs up the slopes. The vine prospers along these sun-baked limestone rocks, and fruit trees luxuriate in them. The peasants have hollowed out houses and caves in the living rock, calling them, in the picturesque language of the wine-growers of Rabelais's land, their "abiding cellars" *(caves demeurantes)* and "*caves du bouère*". Often, as one walks along the edge of the plateau overhanging the river, one sees smoke coming out of the ground. A wretched bonfire? No, for this smoke issues from a short chimney-pot of stones or bricks, and is the chimney of the troglodyte living in the kindly chalk beneath our feet. The villages are hardly ever built on the very edge of the river. Men have preferred to go higher than its bed, which is often filled by the floods, and place them on the platform, built up of fallen stones, at the foot of the limestone wall, or in the wall itself. As we have already observed below Blois, the high ground is reserved for the nobleman's castle.

As we leave the Sologne, coming from Romorantin or Mur, and descend the Cher towards the west, we ought to glance at Selles-sur-Cher, formerly called Selles-en-Berri. This hospitable chief town of a canton is adorned with a very fine church, lying along the side of a pleasant promenade symmetrically planted with trees. The proportions of the

Romanesque façade are very pure and the aisles flank a tall nave. There is no ornament, save a few marble columns, probably Roman, which must also have adorned some Merovingian sanctuary. Inside, the nave is already Gothic and holds one's admiration by the sober harmony of its proportions, which do not lack a certain majesty. At the end, a Romanesque choir, considerably elevated above it, serves as the shell for a vast crypt in which sleep the relics of St. Eusice, the patron saint of the place. A great ambulatory running all round it shows that the church, which was once the chapel of the abbey, was the centre of an important pilgrimage. Even to-day the holy relics are sometimes carried in solemn procession along the streets of the little town, and the remains of St. Eusice follow the banks of the Cher, which the Blessed Abbot, it seems, once caused to return hurriedly to its bed one day when the floods were high.

Selles is no longer in Touraine, though it is in the department of Loir-et-Cher. But, since we are already in Berri, let us make a détour southwards : for Valençay is near at hand.

Valençay is a big country town stretching along the banks of the Nahon. Its air of aloofness marks it as already belonging to Berri, but it none the less charms us by the good-natured, homely manners of its inhabitants. Moreover, I remember a certain goat's milk cheese, creamy and delicately-flavoured, which the peasants of the neighbourhood make in the shape of a truncated pyramid and call Levrou cheese. But we must not let the cheese make us forget the castle, though it is less smiling than the inhabitants of the neighbourhood. It is a majestic and lordly dwelling place, partly disfigured and robbed of its lightness by the centuries subsequent to the XVIth. Memory too lies heavy upon it, for the castle belonged to the Villemorien family, those moneyed and crafty men who were farmers-general, and Talleyrand, who became count, prince, duke and minister by sheer auda-



Selles-sur-Cher. A Capital in the Church.

Château of Valençay.

city and the grace of his wit, a brilliant but slimy blend of glory and shame, covered with everlasting contempt by the avenging pen of Chateaubriand. Valençay was also the prison of a dethroned King of Spain, Ferdinand VII. One might almost think that Talleyrand had desired to hide his domain from peering eyes. A very wide avenue leads up to an iron gate, through which one has a poor, sidelong view of a great façade pierced with windows. High walls surround the park, and behind, from the valley of the Nahon, nothing can be seen but a tower with a slate-covered cupola, crowned by a lantern, and the top of a pavilion, adorned with false machicolations and a covered rampart walk, as at Azay-le-Rideau.

As we stand before the house of the " foxy octogenarian " *(renard octogenaire)*, as George Sand called him, we long for the valley of the Cher. Let us make our way through the beautiful forest of Gâtine and across the rolling uplands of Berri to Saint-Aignan-sur-Cher.

The town bathes its foundations in the river, and contact with the cold water seems to have chilled it for good. The streets, it is true, are

Saint-Aignan-sur-Cher.

tortuous and dark, the houses are old, the shop-fronts repellent and the people reserved. It seems as if this little town, so picturesquely melancholy, had just enough life left to preserve the memories of its past, and its pointed gables, from final extinction. The church reflects in its aspect the external character of the whole region. But if the soul of the people corresponds to that of the church, it must be singularly noble and grave. It is seldom that a Romanesque church with an admixture of Gothic leaves in our minds such a distinct picture of the religious character of the people who built it : a robust faith in a dread Deity, but one who in his very wrath never loses his air of majesty.

As we go upwards from the church, the castle rears its lofty bulk opposite the belfry-porch. As we follow its walls with their steep batter, a fine, easy flight of more than a hundred steps leads us to an oblong courtyard, where a variegated but pleasant mixture of buildings of every style and period greets the eye. On the left a tower in the style of the xvth century has recently been built on the model of the ancient Tour d'Agar. Modern offices of some size have been partly adapted from the ruins of a feudal fortress overgrown with ivy. In front of us, to the right,

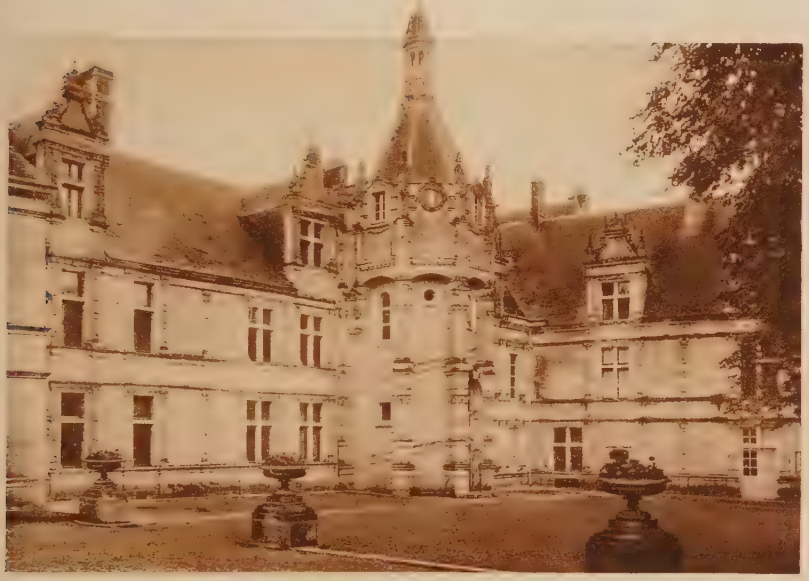
is built at right angles to them a Renaissance château, very much restored, with the heavy addition of a large square pavilion, " in the style " of the rest, dating from 1870. I prefer the less magnificent, but far more attractive garden-front, so graceful with its unintentional breaches of symmetry, with its walls of brick and stone alternating without monotony. From here the eye roves at large over the irregular roofs of the little town and the harmoniously wooded hills which descend in a gentle slope towards the river.

Gateway of Saint-Aignan.

Stairway of the Château of Saint-Aignan.

From Saint-Aignan two roads follow the two banks of the Cher, which now wears that pure and delicate aspect so characteristic of Touraine, soaked in a cool dampness, and yet gay and charming. This is the chief charm of the valley, which, though it has no wide horizons, no majestic outlines, is so varied in its graceful simplicity. The village of Thésée, in spite of its name, calls up no mythological associations, although there is a Roman ruin near by; it rather suggests, by its truly French charm, memories of Racine. Bourré,

with its famous quarries, has given its name to the beautiful white stone of which so many of the fine châteaux of this district are built. And so we come to Montrichard, the gate of Touraine, the most perfect type of the pretty villages on the banks of the Cher.



Château of Saint-Aignan.

A long, shady street, fringed by ancient houses, on which opens the gate of an old hostelry, wide enough to admit a waggon, follows the curved bend of the river and the limestone cliff. Not far away two churches, one the parish church, the other the centre of a famous pilgrimage, raise their bell-towers. On the cliff a mighty ruin still dominates the surrounding country with its crenellated mass, in the midst of which a great rectangular keep calls up memories of Fulk Nerra, who founded it, of Hugh I of Amboise, who rebuilt the castle in the XIIth century, and of the Wars of Religion. Henry IV once besieged the town. Acute psychologist as he was, he knew the value of a collective threat, and had promised the inhabitants that if the town did not surrender by the appointed date, he would " have them all hanged ". And the good people of Touraine, who

Montrichard. View over the Cher.

preferred their much-disturbed peace and quiet to military glory, threw open the gates on the appointed day,

In order to merit still more thoroughly its reputation as a typical village of the banks of the Cher, Montrichard has its vineyards and its cellars to offer. The best of its white wines, which the stony nature of the soil has made full of body, but which the brilliant sun of Touraine has raised to a higher level of excellence, are itreated n special cold cellars by the same process as the best vintage champagne.

In this form as well as in their natural state these wines are drunk all over France and are exported extensively. One of the many delightful attractions of a visit to Touraine is an inspection of the cellars of Montrichard with, of course, a sampling of some world-renowned vintage.

Montrichard. An old Cross.

Chenonceaux.

Chenonceaux. — There is an added touch of charm in beginning our visit to the castles of Touraine with Chenonceaux, and ending it with Azay-le-Rideau and Ussé. The three of them form the most perfect and charming expression of this country, so divine in its softness, in the perfection of its atmosphere, and in the variety and beauty of its architecture.

Chenonceaux carries the graceful stamp of its origin. It was built for a woman, first inhabited by women, and enlarged by a woman.

At the beginning of the XVIth century, there was a mill in the very bed of the Cher, whose rich waters flow by here. It was guarded by a castle, which was itself surrounded by a moat, into which the water was diverted from the stream. Such was Moulinfort. In order to build for his wife, Catherine Briçonnet, a dwelling worthy of his princely fortune, Thomas Bohier, general of finances and favourite of Francis I, razed both mill and castle, and upon the mighty foundations surrounded by the Cher, built in 1515 a pretty, one-storeyed, square château, with its façade broken by overhanging turrets, with a high-pitched roof, great dormer windows and large rectangular chimney-stacks. To the left, on the pointed piers which checked the flow of the river, the architect broke the monotony of the square by a delicate chapel and a little study. Later

Chenonceaux. The Avenue of Planes.

Château of Chenonceaux. The Vestibule.

Diane de Poitiers, by a new whim, made Philibert Delorme span the Cher by a five-arched bridge, which the architect crowned by a long, two-storeyed gallery. The work was continued by Catherine de' Medici, who had forced Diane to exchange Chenonceaux for Chaumont.

Kings and princes lived in it for nearly two hundred years; but its origin was due to a commoner and it was destined to return into the hands of commoners. Dupin, the farmer-general, bought it in 1730 of the Duke of Bourbon. The Revolution suffered old Madame Dupin to die in peace in her own domain, so the lovely house has suffered but little from the ravages of man. None the less, the present owner, M. Menier, has had to devote several millions to restoring his house.

Chenonceaux pleases from the outset. A long avenue of tall plane trees shows in the distance a glimpse of the façade, the pearly tone of which is still more enhanced by the green shades in which it is framed. As we go up the avenue, on the left, a colonnade adorned with four caryatids, the work of Jean Goujon, produces a striking effect in the midst of the foliage, due to the admirable breadth and calm grandeur of its sculptures. At the end, again on the left, a great formal flower-garden and out-build-

Château of Chenonceaux. General View.

ings of considerable size once more recall the memory of Philibert Delorme At last we enter the castle through a delightful green door with delicate carving picked out with gold, on which Bohier had carved his arms and motto : " *S'il vient à point il me souviendra,*" If he comes at the right time, I shall remember; and the second owners their names, separated by the heraldic salamanders: " *Franciscus Dei gratia Francorum rex; Claudia Francorum regina.* "

Inside, Catherine Briçonnet, Diane de Poitiers and Catherine de' Medici have left traces of their ownership. Fine ceilings, rich fireplaces, polished pavements in gay colours, form a setting for tastefully chosen furniture, costly pictures and splendid tapestries. The gallery of Philibert Delorme alone stands bare, but in this way it preserves its austere beauty better. If Catherine

Chenonceaux. Chimney-piece in the room of Diane de Poitiers.

de' Medici were to return to this spot, she would doubtless find it not unworthy of her.

Amboise. — The forest of Amboise, through which we have to pass in order to reach the banks of the Loire of Touraine, is vast, imposing and profound. From Chenonceaux we can cross it at its greatest width, and there is indeed a restful charm in going along by the great Etang des Jumeaux and the long drive which bears the same name.

Chenonceaux. The Main Gateway.

At Amboise we again come upon the river. All of a sudden, the changed quality of the light brings home to one the palpable fact that the valley of the Loire has an atmosphere all its own; indeed it is this atmosphere which constitutes its principal charm. I have myself received this impression on the spacious quays at Amboise, as, beneath a pleasant awning stretched over the pavement, I have enjoyed the simple but perfect dinner, and the natural unspoilt Vouvray, of a restaurant like nearly all those of Touraine. The embankment of the Loire is so high that one has to go up a flight of steps to reach the quay, and from below it one sees nothing but a long parapet and the pale blue sky. As I sat

Chenonceaux. View over the Cher.

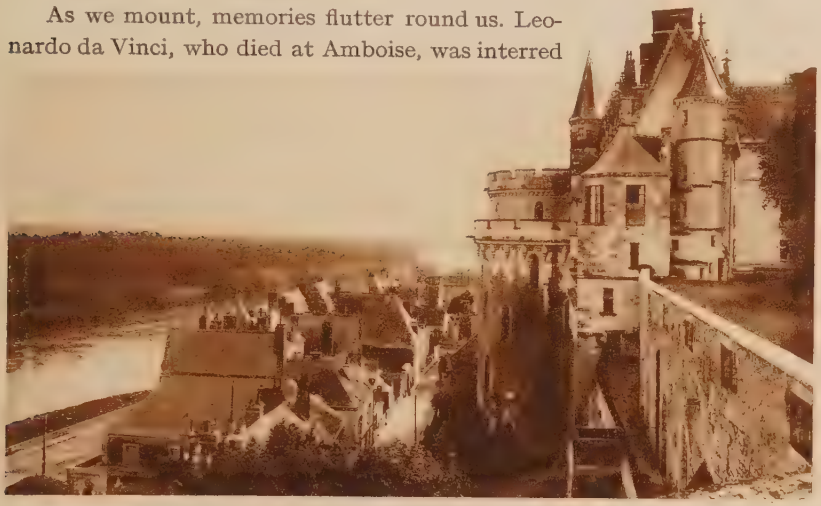
down, a sort of instinct told me — familiar as I am rather with the sea-strand than the banks of rivers : " The sea is there, beyond. " I could not rest till I had seen the Loire flowing listlessly in its bed.

Amboise is the château of Charles VIII, as Blois is that of Louis XII. But Amboise has lost its original character and appearance far more than Blois. The door against which, they say, Charles VIII killed himself by striking his head, no longer leads anywhere. The perfect chapel of Saint Hubert, formerly lying between the part built by Louis XI and the Queen's quarters, is now isolated. Yet what remains of the ancient château has still an imposing effect, when one looks up at it from the banks of the Loire; high walls support the King's quarters, a pure example of the architecture of the close of the xvth century. The enormous round

Chenonceaux. Chimney-piece in the room of Francis Ist.

tower called the Tour des Minimes still enables one to ride up on horseback from the bottom of the valley on to the upper terrace, by means of a gentle slope ascending in a spiral.

As we mount, memories flutter round us. Leonardo da Vinci, who died at Amboise, was interred



Amboise. View on the Loire.

in the chapel dedicated to St. Florentin, now demolished. Famous prisoners (Fouquet, Lauzun, Abd-el-Kader) have been immured within these mighty walls. And the terrace on to which opens the Hall of the Estates, in which Abd-el-Kader was housed, recalls one of the most horrible episodes in French history. Under Francis I a plot of the Protestants against the Guises was revealed by treachery. More than 1,500 Huguenots were taken prisoner, and all of them were put to death, officers and soldiers perishing, the former on the scaffold, the latter on the gallows. Blood flowed in streams at the foot of the walls, and bodies hung from gibbets, or from the pretty wrought-iron balcony which still edges the terrace. Every day witnessed fresh executions, and the court exulted at the sight of the wretched victims. Agrippa d'Aubigné relates how, at the moment of his execution, Ville-Mongié, a gentleman of the Angoumois, " having dipped his hands in the blood of his companions who had just been beheaded, lifted them to heaven as long as

Amboise. General View.

he could, crying out in these words, or some like them " : "Lord, behold the blood of Thy children unjustly shed. Thine shall be the vengeance ". So ended the " Tumult of Amboise ".

Let us return to the open air. These memories, clinging closely to the balcony against which we are leaning, would make one loathe the XVIth century. On the terrace, at least, the charm of the flowers may calm our horror. These hanging gardens are a delight. No doubt they no longer bear much resemblance to those which the kings maintained at great cost, but at any rate they remain gardens, and have even been enlarged by the demolition of some buildings at the be-

Amboise. The Conspirators' Balcony.

Château of Amboise. The Chapel Front.

Amboise. The Chapel and Gardens.

ginning of the XIXth century. In their hanging cup, they seem to form the centre of the immense formal garden which rejoices our eyes as far as the glance can reach : the foliage of the Forest of Amboise, out of which rise the six storeys of the pagoda of Chanteloup; the waterways of the great Loire and the little Cisse; the hills of Limeray, Pocé, Nazelle and Noizay; in the distance, at the end of the vista formed by the stream, the blue spires of Tours Cathedral standing out against a pale sky.

Tours. — When one approaches Tours by the valley of the Cher, that is to say, through the delightful wine-growing villages of Véretz, Larçay, Saint Avertin, one is surprised to see that in this fine, spacious and animated city, a harmonious mixture of houses and public buildings, both ancient and modern, the Loire does not seem to count at all. Yet

The Loire at Tours.

it is the river which I wish to see first, from the magnificent bridge with fifteen elliptical arches, a masterpiece of the later years of Louis XV. And I at once realise why the river has no part in the activity of the city : it is closed to all life, not a boat passes up or down it. The waterway which once echoed with the sound of unloading barges, the songs of the sailors, the shouts of the lightermen, is now dumb, of no further use save to

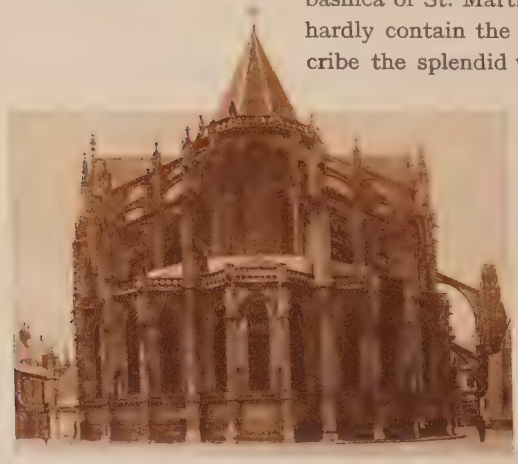
Tours. A Bridge over the Loire.

dreamers, lovers and fishermen. At Blois it forms a majestic pedestal; at Amboise it is a clear mirror; everywhere it is superfluous, or nearly so. But blest be Touraine for this very fact, that it has turned this river, which so many Philistines declare to be useless, into an ornament.

It is pleasant to remark how in a great, living city the houses, ancient and modern, fraternise and live happily together. Castles look haughty and, in little towns, the houses of the Middle Ages are in general gloomy, blind and sickly. Here they are spick and span, well cared for and inhabited, and they seem quite happy to be older than the others and able to tell them more stories. The oldest houses in Touraine did not know St. Martin, but they have seen the growing up of two neighbouring

Tours. Cloister of La Psalette.

towns : the ancient Caesarodunum becoming Tours, and Châteauneuf, first known as Martinopole, the town of St. Martin. They still tell how, in the middle of the XVIth century, military exigencies turned the two cities into one. They relate the legendary splendour of the venerable basilica of St. Martin, whose vast precincts could hardly contain the crowd of pilgrims. They describe the splendid trains of the Kings of France whom they have known : Charles VII, Louis XI, who was so fond of his " good city ", and built beside it his country house at Plessis; Charles VIII, Louis XII, Francis I, Henry III. They tell of the feverish activity of their vanished companions, so numerous that they



Tours. The Apse of the Cathedral.

Tours. The Cathedral and Museum.

Tours. Transept of the Cathedral.

gave shelter to more than eighty thousand souls. They lament that the Wars of Religion, and afterwards the absolute monarchs, should have reduced the ancient wealth of the town almost to nothing, and pulled down the old basilica. They also praise the XIXth century for its successful efforts to renew its prosperity, less rich in works of art, but as fruitful of results as that of the early years of the XVIth century. And if, like grandmothers rendered critical by a liberal, artistic tradition, they look with a reserved eye upon buildings like the new basilica and the town hall, they console themselves by thinking lovingly of the fine buildings of their young days, the Tour du Trésor, now known as the Tour de l'Horloge, the Tour Charlemagne, the fountain of Beaune, Notre-Dame la Riche, the church of Saint Julien, the delightful cloister of La Psalette and above all the admirable cathedral of Saint Gatien, whose magnificent towers would in themselves be worthy to give renown to the town.

And what artists have built, decorated and adorned them! From the time of Gregory of Tours, monks skilled in calligraphy poured out rich manuscripts through the whole of Christendom. In the days of Charlemagne, Alcuin, the abbot of Saint Martin, scholar and artist, still further perfected the art of adorning books with miniatures, which were long preserved by the monks of Saint Martin and Marmoutier. In the XVth century, painters and sculptors, glass-workers and goldsmiths, embroiderers and silk-weavers made of Tours a city of art *par excellence*,

whose activity is summed up in two illustrious names : a marvellous painter, with a talent at once choice and restrained, Jean Fouquet; a powerful and harmonious sculptor, Michel Colombe. This flourishing state continued into the next century, for Jean Clouet was an inhabitant of Tours and his son François was born there. In the XVIIth century, a single great name stands out; though the engraver Abraham Bosse hardly lived at Tours at all, he was born and died there. Nowadays the capital of Touraine makes it a point of honour to uphold its renown as a centre of art, and maintains a fine museum. At its entrance, the garden is adorned with a magnificent cedar, whose harmonious form is in itself alone a regular masterpiece. Happy town, which can combine the charms of nature with those of art!

Luynes. — We are in the land of châteaux. There are so many of them, that one expects to come upon one at every turn of the road. The very landscape is architectural. The limestone border of the valley often takes on the form of buildings or ruined walls, and the trees, in the distance, bathed in a blue atmosphere, group themselves like houses or rise like belfries and towers.

At Luynes it is no dream or illusion. At a turn in the road one is welcomed by houses like pretty old ladies, and just above them, at the head of a steep flight of steps, behind a wall three parts in ruins, the

Tours. Charlemagne's Tower.

castle shows its most frowning aspect. It is a huge, bare wall, swelling out in the middle into a semi-circular tower. In the old moat, half filled in, " impassible nature " has scattered a few smiles : laurels, spindle-trees, acacias, even a cedar, the remains, perhaps, of a garden planted in the days when the castle gave shelter to a lovely mistress. None such, assuredly, has come there for long past, for Luynes is not a fit abode for ladies. A dismal square of stone, broken by high round towers, it is only pleasant to see from afar, a romantic mass with pointed roofs set on a pedestal of verdure. Inside it is closed and silent. In the little brick and stone dwelling-house, half Louis XII, half Louis XIV in style, one can imagine some Baron de Sigognac living with his old dog and his diabolical cat. He only comes out at night into the little oblong yard, made sombre by the deep greens of the groups of laurels and spindle-trees. At sunset, he leans over the narrow terrace overlooking the Loire, and the only pleasure he can enjoy is the sight of the play of sun and shadow over the wide landscape. At his feet the roofs of the town spread out in a wide blue crescent. Beyond them, the river plays between the little islands covered with willows and edged with reddish sand, glittering with sparks of gold. Not far away, a great river — the Cher — winds

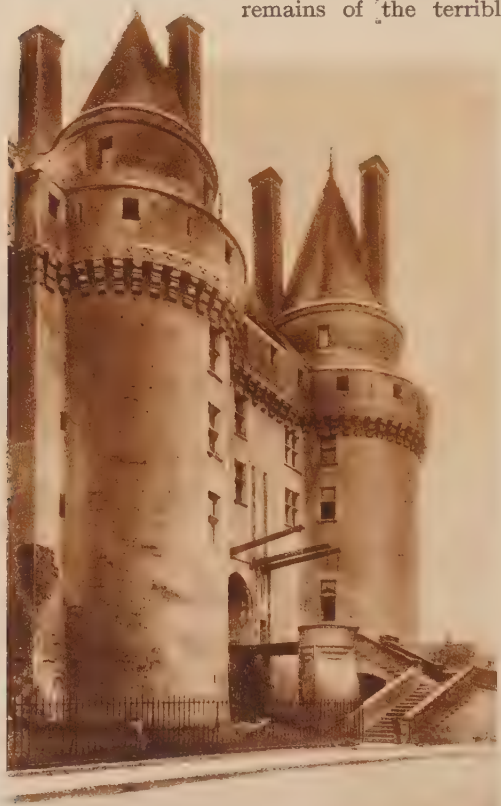
Tours. Entrance to the Museum.

Luynes. General view.

along side by side with the Loire. The two waterways do not yet mingle, but the two valleys now form only one, and the poplars of the Loire are echoed by those of the Cher. On the hill, towards the horizon, other châteaux lie golden in the setting sun : they are Les Carnaux, Les Touches and, above all, Villandry. The anachronistic baron dreams of his gorgeous neighbour, whose precious gallery of Spanish masters — Velasquez, El Greco, Ribera, Zurbaran, Goya — is the delight of his tortured soul. And in the splendid gardens his glance strays in search of the pallid little Infanta, who walks with tiny steps, stiff in her gorgeous robes, with a yellow rose in her hand.

Luynes. XVth century house.

Langeais. — Like Luynes, Langeais is not a joyous abode. The château is built down in the valley and like a sad sentinel, bars the way between the river and the cliff. A uniform grey tint covers its stone walls, its slate roofs, its brick chimneys and adds still further gloom to the austerity of its great towers and the machicolations of its upper rampart walk. After all these centuries it is still redolent of war, massacre and rapine. The great count of Anjou, Fulk Nerra, has, they say, left his mark there in the mighty rectangular keep with massive buttresses, the great dismantled mass of which one still sees in the park. It is all that remains of the terrible battles, which left the fortress time after time now in the hands of the King of France, now in those of the King of England. For the present château was almost entirely built in the middle of the xvth century by Jean Bourré, treasurer of France, the crony of Louis XI.



The Château of Langeais. Entrance.

Seldom has a domain passed so often from hand to hand. At first it was the chances of war which were responsible for this. Besides, Langeais is not one of those attractive places to which one becomes attached. The great lords who were its owners between the xvith and xviiith centuries, can hardly ever have lived there, for none of

them has adorned it after his own taste, so that the enormous mass has to a large extent preserved its original aspect.

On the little *place* before the fortified gate, it was not the memory of Jean Bourré that I saluted, but the great shade of Rabelais. It has tinged with a pleasing grey the pilasters of a little corner house in which the master lived. And since Fate has willed that a little café has been set up in it, let us sacrifice to the manes of Pantagruel by drinking to their memory bottles of Bourgueil and Vouvray.

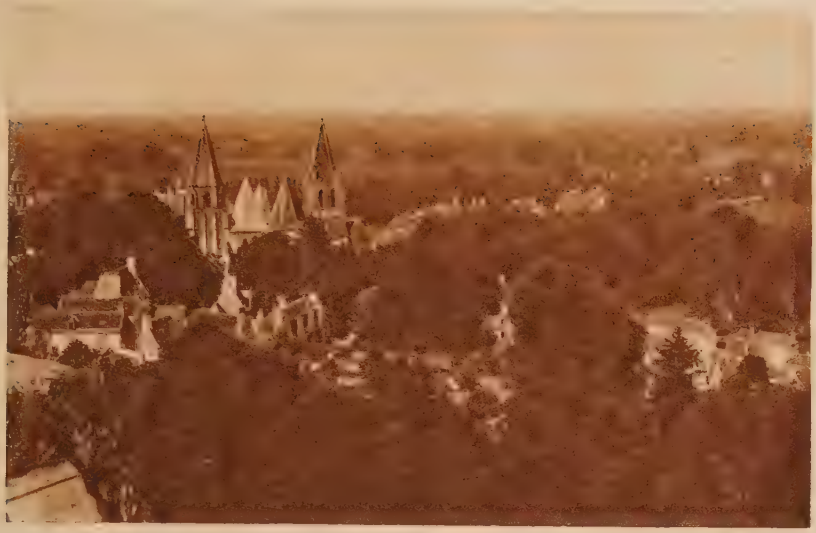
Langeais. The Church and the Château.

In the feudal castle, again, it is not Jean Bourré whom I think of, but Cardinal Richelieu. It is strange to note how often one's thoughts take flight towards other persons instead of those who have built or adorned a domain. If their personality is neither strong nor attractive, other memories turn it out of its own house. The men of feudal days have often a personality which is merely grotesque, and one almost always thinks of them as a nameless and impersonal abstraction. And so at Langeais, though it is a perfect example of the latter days of feudalism, the man of whom we think is he whose harsh but able hand crushed it.

M. Jacques Siegfried, who bequeathed the castle to the Institute of

France, furnished it completely, devoting great learning and much money to this end. But I imagine this man of taste must often have felt the idea which he had conceived, namely that of recreating the background of life in the xvth century, to be monotonous. Before the doors, with their great moustaches of curving stone, beneath the fine ceilings in the French style, before the wonderful Flemish tapestry, with its blue ground sown with fantastic flowers, I feel out of place in my travelling costume. Yet, left alone in one of the rooms, I sit dreaming in an armchair, and forget the little blonde concierge, with her bunch of rattling keys and her cicerone's speech learnt by heart. The man who lived in this room four hundred years ago can teach me nothing about the depths of his soul, since I know scarce more about my own than about his. He loved, hated, suffered and enjoyed. The rest is only a matter of gestures, costumes and imagination.

Tours. Gallery of the Cloister of Saint Martin.



Loches. Looking down from the Donjon.

CHAPTER III

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In the Valleys of the Indre and the Vienne

Loches. — Loches offers a notable example to those who explain the formation of individual characters by the influence of their surroundings; for in its image was formed the romantic soul of Alfred de Vigny : passionate, yet harmonious, haughty, yet steeped in generous humanity, limpid, yet often storm-swept. Like her illustrious child, Loches is a mass of contradictions : fine boulevards leading up to a picturesque jumble of houses climbing up the slope, a delightful Renaissance town-hall, supported by an old Gothic gate, and a fortified platform on which a frowning keep, a wonderful

Loches. The Donjon.

Romanesque church, and an elegant Louis XII dwelling-house stand side by side.

This great platform (it is 550 yards long by, on an average, more than 110 yards wide) is contained by a wall through whose many breaches there pours in a flood of historic memories : the Merovingian *vicus*, a peaceful community of free men, soon became a fortified bridge-head, which was taken and destroyed by the sons of Charles Martel, Pippin and Carloman. A mighty castle was next reared by Fulk Nerra. It was rebuilt, its walls breached and repaired by John Lackland, Richard of the Lion Heart, Henry II Plantagenet and Philip Augustus in turn; and it saw capricious Fortune smile now on the English crown and now on the French. Charles VII built a less austere abode there, as a home for his amours with Agnes Sorel, the Lady of Beauté, who, in the words of the historians, filled the royal court with " men and women of ill fame ", and inaugurated the period of debauch which closed his reign. Louis XI lived there a long time when still dauphin, before he went to govern in person his appanage of Dauphiné. He remembered his castle of Loches later on, and " improved " its prisons, which " sheltered ",

among others, Cardinal La Balue, Philippe de Commines, George of Amboise, Lodovico il Moro, Duke of Milan, and the Comte de Saint-Vallier, father of Diane de Poitiers. Louis XII enlarged the dwelling-house built by Charles VII, and built in stone that gem of pure style which still overlooks the gate of the Cordeliers. But the kings lived but little in their house at Loches, in which they had too much the appeararee of gaolers; and even the Republic has kept up the tradition. Though the King's house has become a charming *sous-préfecture*, the old feudal castle is still a prison. Moreover, the cicerone who takes charge of visitors wears the uniform of the prisons department. In this labyrinth of vaulted corridors, spiral staircases, dungeons and black holes, he gives vent to his grotesque gaoler's imagination in a stream of far-fetched explanations; and the fact is, the place is such as to evoke such ideas. Let us at any rate bless the old guardian for relieving our spirits of the pain which seizes upon them in this hideous, dark, cruel prison. His melodramatic voice places these surroundings on the level of the dramas of Alexandre Dumas; and so the defenders of the keep, the Duke of Alençon, the judges who presided over the torture-chambers, Louis XI, La Balue, Philippe de Commines, Lodovico Sforza, the

The Indre at Loches.

Loches. Oratory of Anne of Brittany.

Bishops of Autun and La Puy, shed their legendary attributes, and take on the conventional attitudes of puppets in the romantic drama. The worthy man illustrates, without knowing it, the sage motto scratched in a window-embrasure by some hand in Gothic days — said to have been that of the chronicler of Louis XI "*Dixisse me aliquando paenituit, tacuisse nunquam.*" (I have sometimes repented of speaking, never of holding my tongue).

The gaoler leaves us at the door of the prison : we no longer need him in the rest of the precincts, which are less horrible than the donjon. The old collegiate church of Saint-Ours, with its two pyramidal cupolas

Loches. Front of the Church of Saint Ours.

flanked by Romanesque towers, looks from the outside like a series of linked bell-towers; but how dignified is the interior, with its austere simplicity! Beyond, in the garden of the king's house, an enormous chestnut tree, planted, they say, by Francis I, spreads wide its boughs of fantastic length.

Loches. Tomb of Agnes Sorel.

Loches. Porte des Cordeliers.

The house itself contains a delicately-wrought chapel, whose walls are adorned by the cord and ermines of Anne of Brittany; and in the basement of a tower is the tomb of Agnes Sorel. Below the terrace descends a tangle of greenery, through which, here and there, gleam blue roofs and the Romanesque spire of the old abbey church of Beaulieu. In the distance, the broad indigo line of the Forest of Loches, which is national property, closes the horizon.

Loches. Hôtel de Ville and Porte Picoys.

From Loches to Montbazon by the valley of the Indrois. — We must leave Loches by its suburb, Beaulieu. Fulk Nerra was buried in the church of the abbey which he had built. In 1870 some bones were found and a square skull, of which the bold protuberances, the low brow, and the deeply sunk eye sockets still revealed a haughty harshness and an obstinate tenacity. Such were the remains of the legendary lord who impressed his powerful personality upon the whole land of Anjou and Touraine.

A cool and lovely walk in the heart of the forest soon bathes in soft memories our minds overflowing with castles and tales of feudalism. How good it is to saunter along the drives, thinking of nothing but the charm of the green shades, and the sunlight resting on the clearings! There is no life here save that of Nature, free from mankind, — the rustle of the trees in the passing wind, the flies dancing in the sunlight, the cry of a bird in its flight, the light scamper of a rabbit as we turn the corner of a

path. At the edge of the road, not far from a little stream, some ingenious townspeople have restored a little life to the ruins of the old Carthusian monastery of Le Liget, founded by a King of England, the Angevin Henry II Plantagenet, rebuilt in the XVIIIth century, and demolished at the Revolution. The crumbling walls are draped in ivy, surrounding beds of brilliant roses. It must be easy to forget one's troubles here, if it is true that the solemn mystery of the woods lulls the spirit and fills it with stillness.

Gate of the Château of Montrésor.

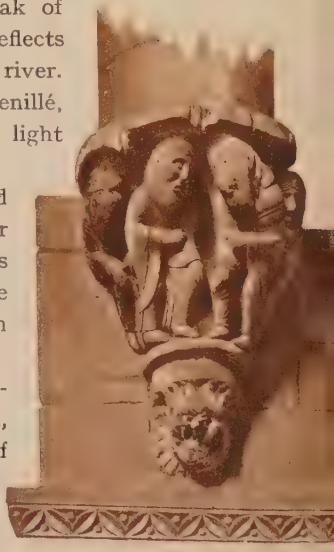
Leaving the forest, we find ourselves in the pretty, narrow valley of the Indrois. Montrésor mirrors in the green river the dismantled towers of its feudal castle, and the pointed roofs of its Louis XII manor-house, with its survivals of the Gothic style. The place is melancholy, and even a little sad, one knows not why. But this sadness is soon traced to its source; for in one of the rooms in the castle are enclosed the memories of an extinct monarchy and a country for centuries effaced from the map of Europe. The rich treasure of the Kings of Poland slumbers in its glass cases, and the Polish eagle lies, as if in death, upon the gold and silver-work which belonged to John Sobieski and Sigismund II.

Montrésor. Detail of the Gate.

Neither Montrésor nor the valley of the Indrois is invaded by tourists. All the better for us, for we can enjoy the rare picturesqueness of its shady roads in peace.

Loches.

The river is narrow, and winds at its own sweet will between walls of verdure; the road follows the caprices of the waterway, sometimes through woods, sometimes among rocks; the great trees are varied by gorse and juniper, the sun catches the precipitous break of the cliff, plays in the hollow of the roads, and reflects itself in a wavy pattern on the surface of the river. Smiling villages deck its banks. Chemillé, Genillé, Chédigny, names as gracious as the golden light which falls upon them.



Suddenly the narrow valley grows wider, and in front of it rises a fresh precipice, as if to bar its way. But a full stream flows gently at its foot, where the waters of the Indrois join those of the Indre, like a child returning to the bosom of the mother who gave it its name.

Of all the rivers of Touraine, the Indre is certainly the most loveable. Balzac knew it well, and in its valley he planted the sweetest lily of

his collection, the Comtesse de Mortsauf. Within the symmetrical, basket-like hollow, woven, as it were, of wood and meadows, the river stretches its limbs in wanton curves. Its dark green waters are almost black, forming a deep mirror, made deeper here and there by the shadows of great trees. They flow without haste and lazily, forming a thousand twisting loops, as if they were loath to leave this happy land. The water-reeds raise their light crests above the surface, water-lilies float upon it here and there, and the water seems no more than a moving meadow, a continuation of the moist pastures along its banks. From time to time the symphony in green is drowned by a note of brilliant gold, struck by the yellow sand which fringes the shore; but soon the characteristic melody is resumed, an exquisite harmony of deep tones, as the river plunges for a moment beneath a bower of quivering branches. At times a sharper note makes itself felt : the clatter of a mill weaves a fantastic pattern in the soft melody; then the harmony grows calmer, returning to its deeper and more muted tones, till the hand of night hushes it to an imperceptible murmur.

Montrésor. The old Château.

I arrived at Montbazon one fine summer day at twilight. The great keep of Fulk Nerra and the old bridge were already veiled in violet; along the valley the green of the poplars was turning to a deeper hue, the willows to a more ashen grey. The meadows still gleamed at the edge of the brown water, and seemed alone to hold the light. A great tree in front of me was almost black. The sky towards the setting sun was of rosy hues,

turning above this to green and grey; higher still, the greens and greys faded into a perfect azure. A red cloud, with a purple lining, turning to a cold violet, was stretched in a long band along the horizon. The stillness was only broken by the long cries of the lingering swallows and the brief chirp of a humble cricket at my feet. On the slope of the hill, the château turned a deeper and deeper blue. Then, beneath a light mist, the trees in their turn turned slowly blue. As the band of light on the horizon gradually shrank, the cloud assumed a slaty tone, the different planes of green melted into one another till they formed a single screen of gloom, and then all turned blue by imperceptible degrees, even the meadow, regretfully giving out into space the light which it had drunk in all day. The river flowed black beneath the trees and past the islands. No noise was to be heard save the dull murmur of the town as it settled itself to sleep. But what was no longer perceptible to the eye or to the ear, could be distinguished at this peaceful hour by its scent : it was an indefinable perfume, at once rich and delicate, made up of dried river-herbs, evaporated water and new-mown hay. And I fell asleep with my window open, lulled by the gentle caress of the water breaking against

Azay-le-Rideau. The South Front.

Azay-le-Rideau. The Entrance.

the piles of the old bridge, and intoxicated by the subtle fragrance breathed forth by the pleasure-loving valley.

Azay-le-Rideau. — In order to enjoy the charm of the château of Azay without reflection, one ought to have paused for some time between Artannes, Pont-de-Ruan and Saché, and recalled, as far as one could, the savour of art and of humanity which belongs to *Le Lys dans la Vallée.* Of all the great writers of Touraine, Balzac has certainly given to those who do not live there the best insight into the very soul of the Indre region. For Azay-le-Rideau adds to the charms of nature and of art a literary element which is only perceptible after previous preparation. All these elements are so intimately mingled that a traveller who would analyse them must be possessed of some culture.

There is nothing here to distract the mind from this marvel : few historical memories, no grand or picturesque ruins. The village itself is hospitable and ordinary — no more — in spite of its venerable church and a few ancient houses. But let us hold fast to the spell of Balzac ;

Château d'Azay. North-east aspect.

it will increase our religious emotion, and aid us to understand the deep human passion in nature when it is not too much spoilt by man. Azay-le-Rideau moves us exactly like a beautiful woman adorned for love, whom one longs to clasp in one's arms, but would never dream of touching. Its charm, though intense, is so intellectual, that one would not spoil it by touching it with one's hand.

The château makes plain to the least experienced eye the part played by a disciplined nature as an adjunct to its architecture. The art did not consist merely in making a beautiful house : the house must also be in harmony with the landscape. Azay, transported into the flat plains of the north, or even as far as to the banks of the Roumer, at Langeais, would undoubtedly lose much of its charm. And so we have a concrete example of how nature and art can form one indissoluble whole.

And indeed, it would be difficult to find a more harmonious *ensemble* than this château set in the midst of the Indre, and cleverly enhanced by a rich setting of verdure. The river is diverted so as to flow all round the house; it is covered with water-lilies, so that here, better than any-

Azay. East Front.

where else, the river might justly be called a "flowing pool"; and all round it, willows and hornbeams dip their branches in the water, giving to the park the inexpressible charm of cool peace and quiet intimacy.

The house in itself is so delicately harmonious, its proportions are so perfect, that one has to think before saying whether it is big or small. Its ornamental carvings are not of much account, and have no suggestion of heaviness; they merely emphasise the elegance of its outlines. This admirable adaptation of line and ornament strikes the least sophisticated — I might almost say the most obtuse perceptions. It is only the hypercritical who could regret the construction in 1845, " in the same style ", of the entrance tower, which is too thick and rather heavy.

The architect has preserved just enough of the feudal tradition to mark the seigniorial character of the house : a central mass broken by towers. But what innovations he has introduced, perhaps unconsciously ! We no longer have a dismal courtyard closed on all four sides, or almost blind outer walls; but a demi-château formed by two almost equal buildings built at right angles to each other. No more narrow conduits, in which the water seems to be gloomily imprisoned, but the lovely Indre itself, broadened sufficiently for the castle to reflect in its mirror on all sides its windows and its roofs. No more tall,

Azay. The Virgin by della Robbia.

heavy flanking towers, but light, overhanging turrets, whose pepper-pot roofs and high leaden ornaments do not project above the roofs of the principal buildings. No more thick battlements round the edge, but great corbels supporting a sham rampart walk, turned into a gallery, the embrasures of which have been transformed, by a charming innovation, into windows. The most traditional marks of feudal architecture are found transformed into the ornaments of a pleasure-house. Declining feudalism decks itself with flowers to persuade itself that it is still living; but it had vitiated its very principles by welcoming a financier like Gilles Berthelot, treasurer of France, who became lord of Azay-le-Rideau by the power of money.

Azay. Chimney-piece of Francis I.

Finally, this happy work of art was not spoilt by the new Italian fashion which in 1520 was coming in. Externally, the principal entrance displays three rows of windows framed with columns and niches, crowned with a pyramidal gable. The windows on all the fronts are framed by pilasters, and, on the second storey, dormer-windows, surmounted by carved pinnacles, run all round the château, and break the monotony of the high, slate-covered roof. Inside, the Italianised Renaissance has distributed the apartments conveniently, and adorned with coffering the elliptical vault of the straight staircase, where between pendentives and brackets, which are still Gothic in style, the profiles of the Kings of France, from Louis XI to Henry IV, are ranged two by two in rows, facing each other.

Ussé. View on the Indre.

We shall not stay long in the living-rooms, for Azay is an abandoned dwelling-house. I know nothing more dismal than a poor museum set up in a beautiful house of bygone days, unless it is cleverly adapted to its surroundings. True to the motto carved upon the façade, we have but " a single desire ", namely, to plunge into the neighbouring woods, and cast our eyes and spirits on the moving charm of this truly French spectacle : a perfectly proportioned castle, its blue roofs mirrored in the green water, adorned with just the right number of dormer-windows, roof-ornaments and chimney-stacks to create a picturesque impression without fuss or heaviness.

Ussé. — If we follow the southern edge of the valley of the Loire from Tours to Saumur, by way of Villandry, Rigny-Ussé and Candes-Montsoreau, the road passes along the edge of the curious district of Varennes, a broad river-bottom to which the alluvial deposits of the Loire, the Cher and the Indre have given an amazing fertility. Cultivated fields stretch before us, splendid trees descend in long rows to the water, like battalions executing some military operation. On all sides one has

Ussé. The Château and Terraces.

an impression of beneficent moisture, along the streamlets, dykes, river-arms, *boires* and canals which wind about this valley, in which the Loire, Cher and Indre are almost mingled, and the abundant verdure shows that it is nourished by fertilising waters almost level with the soil. The joy which one feels in traversing this land, teeming with life and rich sap, is almost a sensual one. A tender light bathes the whole region in softness, inclines us to idle dreaming, or leads us into conversation with some peasant. On the threshold of his modest *bouque* the man answers in a leisurely way in a very pure, slightly archaic French, preserving certain intonations and accents of the XVIIth century.

Suddenly, in the distance, set in a mass of verdure like a green velvet jewel-case, appears a great white and blue château, the details of which one cannot yet distinguish, but which, one can see, is very fine : such a frame must indeed contain a work of art.

We draw near, and our hopes are not disappointed. Ussé is indeed one of the most stately, yet exquisite things which one could possibly see. The château is placed on the side of the hill above three terraces rising in tiers, gay with flowers in summer, to which its orange-trees in pots lend

Ussé. The Chapel.

a formal dignity. Behind the château is what one might take for another terrace; but it is the edge of the cliff, where the last trees of the Forest of Chinon come to an abrupt end.

Ussé forms a perfect contrast with Azay-le-Rideau. The latter gives signs of an arrangement which already strikes a classic note; the former, as a whole, is Gothic and feudal. The one is crowned with high-pitched roofs of a sober elegance, the other is decked with such a variety of roofs that one might almost imagine the architects had laid a wager tc include as many styles as possible : the roofs of the main buildings, long, square, or with the angles cut off, the round roofs of the defending towers, the square roofs of the watch-towers, the indented roof of the pretty little lantern, dormer-windows with crockets, pinnacles or gables, chimney-stacks high and low, square or rectangular, in stone and brick, in stone, or in brick-work, — but all so harmoniously symmetrical and varied, that one is at once irresistibly reminded of the palace of a king in a fairy story. Azay mirrors its walls in the Indre, while Ussé is surrounded, not by water, but by the luxuriant green undulations of the Varennes country, forming as it were a sumptuous drapery around it. Finally, Azay hides itself in a sort of melancholy, while Ussé displays without false modesty its jovial walls and laughing roofs.

Seldom has a château been oftener restored; but none, on the whole, has been treated more happily or with more intelligence. Langeais has

preserved its grim unity, but Ussé has been thoroughly transformed. The feudal castle built in the middle of the xvth century by Jean de Bueil had its valley-front laid low and its courtyard thrown open by the d'Espinay family in the xvith century. The xviith century raised the terraces one above the other, remodelled the gallery at the end of the courtyard, and built a new west wing. When Vauban married his daughter to the son of the owner of the place, Louis Bernin de Valentinay, he could admire the house in its finished state. The xixth century could do no worse than add a touch of heaviness by an unintelligent restoration of one of the inner façades.

When one stops at Ussé one should not fail to visit the charming collegiate church founded in 1520 by Jacques d'Espinay and built, a little way from the castle, yet near at hand, by his son Charles. The structure is still Gothic, but the chapel is delicately adorned with sculptures of Italian inspiration, but French workmanship.

In the land of Rabelais. — At Chinon, at the door of the Hôtel de France, I was greeted by a joyful exclamation : "What! You here? "

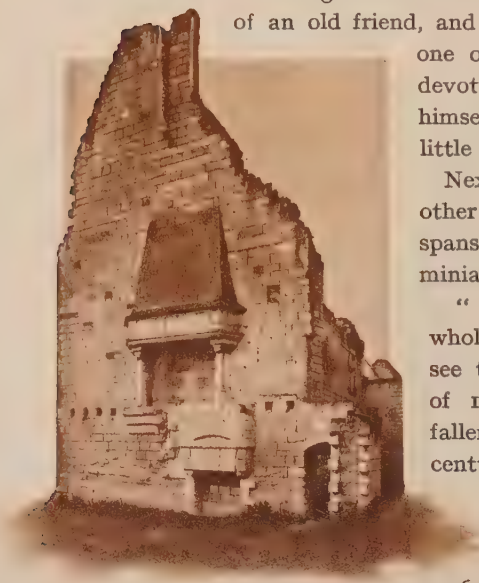
Chinon. The Village and Château.

Chinon. General view along the Vienne.

I recognised the bushy beard and learned spectacles of an old friend, and in a minute we learn that while one of us is travelling, the other is devoting his summer leisure to soaking himself in mediaeval antiquities in the little half-dead town.

Next morning we were talking at the other end of the old bridge, which spans the waters of the Vienne, a miniature Loire.

" Look, " said my friend, " the whole town lies before your eyes. Now see this reproduction of an engraving of 1753. How many buildings have fallen into ruins since the XVIIth century! The picturesque fortifica-



Chinon. Ruins of the Throne Room.

Chinon. Pavillon de l'Horloge.

Chinon. Old Houses.

tions, bathed by the river from one end of the town to the other, no longer exist. While the churches of Saint-Maurice and Saint-Etienne are still almost intact, that of Saint-Mesme has been abominably mutilated. The castle? Look what has become of it. One can hardly distinguish the three fortresses of which it was made up : on the right, the Château de Saint-Georges... but one can no longer see it, for it has become a vineyard. In the middle, the Château du Milieu, the entry to which is through the slender Pavillon de l'Horloge, which rises before you; those stretches of wall and roofless gables were the old dwelling-house of Charles VII. On the left, nothing is left of the Château du Coudray but two towers, down there towards the river, a half-ruined keep, where Joan of Arc stayed, and a dismantled enceinte. " All is ruin and mourning, " as Victor Hugo would have said. "

The castle was by turns a Celtic *dun*, a Roman *castrum*, a Merovingian fortress. You know that Chinon came into the hands of the Plantagenet kings with the appanage of Anjou, that Henry II of England died a wretched death there, that John Lackland was married there, and that Philip Augustus gained possession of it in 1205, after a siege lasting a year. In 1321 Philip V, the Long, held an auto-

Chinon. Front of Saint Etienne.

da-fé of Jews on the island of Tours, below at our feet. Later came the dismal puppet Charles VII, and the good Maid of Lorraine who led him to Reims. Philippe de Commines, who was governor of the fortress

Château of Chinon. General view.

under Louis XI, had his arms stamped upon the façade of the church of Saint-Etienne... Richelieu took possession of the castle, as of so many other things...

Further, it was he and his family who reduced the ruins to the condition which you can still see... And talking about Richelieu, I advise you to go to-morrow as far as the little town which bears his name, a few leagues away. You will see a whole town built by him, in a terribly dull style, which does not lack a certain monotonous grandeur; though the great cardinal's enormous palace, which used to be a sort of bastard Louvre crossed with Versailles, has completely disappeared. "

" And François Rabelais of Chinon? "

" You will find practically nothing of our Master at Chinon. Look at this horrible fellow in bronze and tell me whether you would take it for Rabelais. Let us turn down the Rue de la Lamproie, in which the

La Devinière. Rabelais' birthplace.

inn of the same name preserves hardly any traces of the XVIth century. Rabelais was not born there, for he saw the light at La Devinière, four miles from here, on the very site of the war with Pichrocole. And his father was not an inn-keeper, but a lawyer, the owner of a large estate, and lord of Chavigny-en-Vallée. Let us leave these associations, which degrade the memory of a great man, and take a walk in the town. It at least has not changed too much : the streets are quite as tortuous as at the end of the XVth century, and there are very many old houses still standing. Look at the Romanesque tower of the church of Saint-Maurice with its clear-cut lines and elegant proportions. Consider that fine Descent from the Cross on the wall. It is ascribed to Rubens, but do you not think it might as soon be signed Crayer or Van Dyck? "

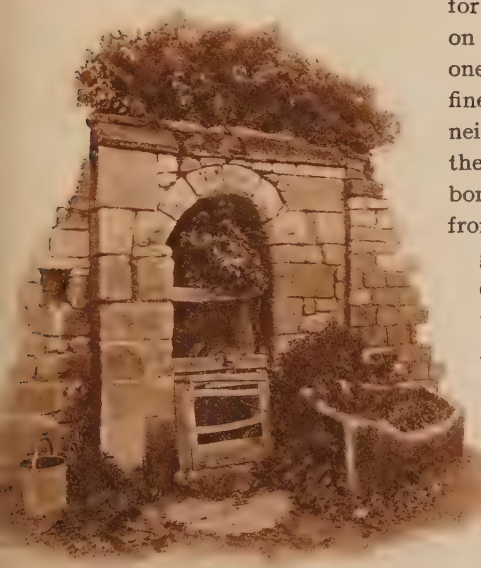
" Perhaps. But in this land of fine châteaux and great memories, painting leaves me almost indifferent. I would rather see Rabelais' native village. "

We went to La Devinière; and I do not regret it.

From the road, running between walls of mortarless stone which support the adjacent plots of land and have vines trained over them, a little sunk path leads up to some old farm-buildings. In the remotest corner rises a white stone house, grown grey with time. It is quite tiny, no more than a single room, which one enters directly from a

flight of four steps, through a low doorway with an elliptically arched top. Across the front, a staircase with thirteen stone steps, worn down by long use, leads to the one upper storey. Two octagonal pillars support a projecting portion of the slate roof, which thus shelters the steps. In this room, with its bare walls, a peasant bed raises its canopy, which is suspended from the beams of the ceiling. There, tradition says, was born François Rabelais. This great memory takes entire possession of us, and the work is so much identified with its creator, that we instinctively enlarge the walls of the modest house, as he himself did in his *Gargantua*. The places in which he lived are transformed, and assume his proportions. La Devinière is the palace of Grandgousier, the " good jester "; the old king is seated beneath the chimney-piece and " while he waits for the chestnuts to be done, he writes on the hearth with a stick charred at one end, relating to his wife and family fine tales of days gone by. " In the neighbouring meadow of La Saulsaye, on the banks of the Négron, Gargantua is born, while the neighbours from Cinais, from Seuilly, from Roche-Clermaut, Vaugaudry and Le Coudray-Montpensier dance and disport themselves while they sip their *vin pineau*. Not far from here lived the wicked Pichrocole, King of Lerné. But lo! By chance a quarrel about cakes and grapes embroils the shepherds of Seuilly and the cake-sellers of

Chinon. An old house.



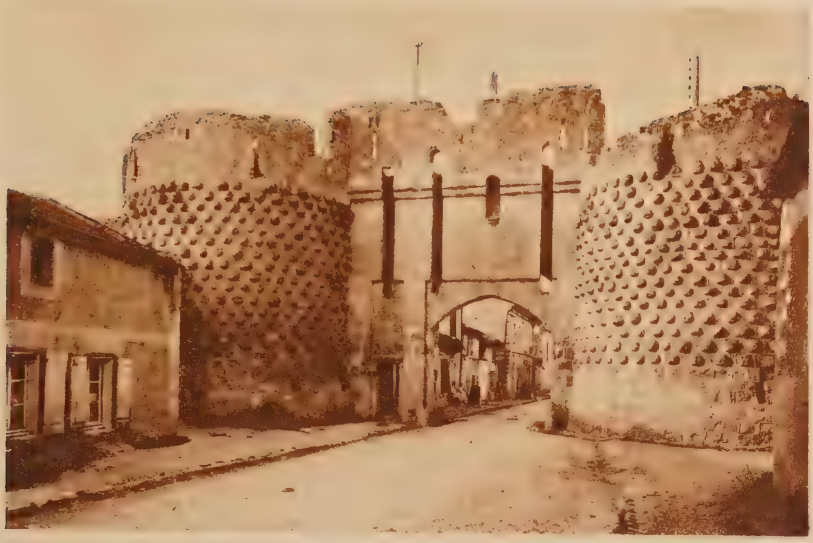
La Devinière. The old Wells.

Lerné on the great highway. This gives Pichrocole a good pretext. He declares war on Grandgousier; and all the country is full of fire and slaughter, up to the gates of Chinon. It is here that Gargantua and Friar John des Entommeures cover themselves with glory — that is to say, Rabelais' father and a dignitary of the convent of Seuilly. The researches of modern scholars have proved that the war with Pichrocole merely transports into the realm of legend an affray which took place between the servants of Antoine Rabelais, lord of Chavigny-en-Vallée, the owner of La Devinière and other demesnes, licentiate in laws and an advocate at the court of Chinon, and the vassals of Gaucher de Sainte-Marthe, esquire, Lord of Chapeau, of Villedan, of Lerné and other places, counsellor and physician-in-ordinary to the King, physician to the Abbess of Fontevrault and the Constable Charles of Bourbon.

This war between giants all took place within the tiny valley watered by the Négron and, coming out of this enormous dream, I was quite astonished to find myself still in the modest demesne of La Devinière.

This hamlet is one of the tiniest in France, and is little frequented by tourists, but its simplicity adds a moving touch to the memory of one of our greatest writers.

Château du Coudray-Montpensier.



Montreuil-Bellay. Porte Saint Jean.

CHAPTER IV

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The Angevin Loire

Fontevrault. — On the borders of Touraine and Anjou, in a picturesque little valley once surrounded with woods, where a little streamlet welled up, — the Evrault, which has given its name to the district, — a Breton monk, Robert d'Arbrissel, founded in 1096 a monastery originally consisting of four houses. One, the Grand Moustier, gave shelter to some nuns, whose abbess governed the whole order; the second, Saint-Jean-de-l'Habit, contained monks, who were the chaplains of the community and administered its property; a third, the Madeleine, was a house for rescued women; and lastly, Saint-Lazare was a hospital and lazar-house. Thanks to the energy of its founder and of Pétronille de Chemillé, the first abbess, Fontevrault bloomed into one of the finest flowers of the monastic garden planted at the same period : Grandmont, Solesme, the Grande-Chartreuse, Citeaux, Clairvaux. At the end of the XIIth century, the abbey was the

Fontevrault. The Grand-Moustier Chapel.

favourite monastery of the Angevin Kings of England. Henry II and Richard of the Lion Heart were buried there, and with them Eleanor of Aquitaine, married first to Louis VII of France, and then, after her divorce, to Henry II of England, and Isabella of Angoulême, the wife of John Lackland and mother of Henry III

The monastery shared in the vicissitudes of the religious orders throughout the centuries. During the Hundred Years' War, ruin and pillage, combined with a relaxation of discipline, made the abbey an insecure place and a centre of scandal. Marie of Brittany, in the xvth century, failed to restore discipline. Marie of Bourbon, and after her Louise of Bourbon, brought back to the house order and a good atmosphere, and rebuilt the convent buildings. Richelieu tried to reform the religious orders, as he did the civil administration. After him, Marie-Madeleine de Rochechouart de Mortemart, sister of the Montespan, became abbess of Fontevrault at the age of twenty-five, and brought to the old monastery the fragrance of virtue and courtly politeness. Louis XV deigned to have Mesdames de France, his daughters (nicknamed by him Coche, Loque, Graille and Chiffe) educated there, and the Logis Bourbon was built for

Fontevrault. The Apse.

them near the monastery. During the Revolution the convent was sacked and laid waste, and the tombs violated. The monastery became a prison, and has remained one to this day. Nowadays it is entered by a heavy, sombre door with an enormous grated opening; and in its mournful paths the uniform of the prison warders rubs shoulders with the grey blouse of the convicts.

The ruins accumulated by the ages and completed by the prisons department have left but few buildings standing, and those sadly mutilated : the church of the Grand Moustier, the cloister and Chapter House, the refectory, and the curious kitchen known as the Tour d'Evrault. The others have disappeared or are not open to the public.

The church has been much mutilated in the course of the centuries, and chiefly during the last two. At the beginning of the xxth century, the nave was still divided up into several storeys, containing the prison dormitories and refectories. Since then the nave has been cleared, the vaulting over each of the bays has been reconstructed, the wall separating the transept and choir from the rest of the edifice has been pulled down, and restoration has begun. If this fine zeal continues, we shall end by

Fontevrault. The Cloisters.

Fontevrault. Tombs of Eleanor of Aquitaine and Henry II.

having a perfectly new XIIth century church in the style of Viollet-le-Duc, entirely stripped of the additions of succeeding generations, which had added charm to its primitive harshness. Such as it is, strong and severe, it still remains one of the finest monuments of Romanesque religious architecture. From the entrance one descends by a dozen steps into a mighty nave without aisles, with four great bays surmounted by vaulting with pendentives. This rather low nave leads to a lofty transept and choir, much higher than the church, and the contrast lends them an appearance of light and delicate grace.

Though this chapel is empty and its floor defiled by the litter of an all too drastic restoration, it is a place of pious pilgrimage for every English soul. At the entrance to the choir, on the gospel side, about in the same position as the tomb of Louis XI at Cléry, there used to lie beneath the pavement what was formerly known as the Cemetery of the Kings. This part was greatly modified in course of time. Nothing is left but four stone coffins ; and the statues which used to adorn them now lie behind heavy prison bars, in a chapel off the right arm of the transept. On four

Fontevrault. The Chapter House.

draped beds sleep Henry II, his wife Eleanor of Aquitaine, their son Richard I of the Lion Heart and their daughter Isabella of Angoulême, wife of John Lackland and mother of Henry III. The two Kings, wearing their crowns on their heads, clasp their long sceptres to their bosoms. Queen Eleanor, with a book of hours in her hand, lies for ever in an attitude of prayer and chastity which was somewhat foreign to her during her life. Queen Isabella crosses her hands modestly on her bosom.

Standing before these scattered remains of their tombs, one thinks of the hapless Angevin kings, harsh, passionate and vacillating, whose own lack of foresight did as much to ruin them as the skill and energy of Philip Augustus. Henry II, who sleeps there on his bed of stone, a calm and stately giant, died a miserable death. On July 4, 1189, when he was almost in his last agony, he desired to appear in royal state before his conqueror, and signed standing the treaty forced on him by Philip II. Two days later, abandoned by everybody, he expired in the chapel of the castle at Chinon, before the altar, vomiting blood at the mouth and nose. His death was the signal for a disgraceful outburst of

Fontevrault. Doorway of the Chapter House.

pillage. His linen, his silver, his jewels, — his very clothes were stolen by greedy servants, and, as the historian William Marshal relates, " the King of England lay naked as he had come into the world, save for his shirt and drawers ". On July 7, the barons bore his body to Fontevrault, where Richard, the rebel son, came to see him. Thoughtful but impas-

Fontevrault.

sive, he stood near the head of the coffin, then went out without speaking a word. On the morrow, the barons laid their king in the earth, and " gave him the finest service they could, as was meet for a King, by divine right and right of law ".

Dead royalty, a perished abbey, an empty church, what mourning surrounds us on all sides ! The cloister too is abandoned, which looked upon royal abbesses and listened to the chatter of the worldly nuns. But its elegant gallery at least has not been touched, with its graceful, pointed arches built in the XVIth century. The pavement of black and white, with the initials of Renée and Louise of Bourbon, imposes on visitors a respectful silence. A Renaissance doorway with fine ironwork opens into a wide chapter hall, in which light columns support the springing of the

The Banks of the Thouet. Montreuil-Bellay.

arches. But above all I love the old-world cloister garden, in which a round pool and an old stone fountain are set off by slender trees, while the hollyhocks which edge the walks point heavenward their spires of pale, transparent flowers.

We must not leave Fontevrault without visiting the little parish church. Almost opposite the prison, at the end of a narrow avenue of clipped limes, it raises its modest façade with a pointed gable; two old bells slumber in a rectangular window. In front of the church, and along the side front, runs a wooden porch, which also serves as a market on market-days. Inside, beneath the broad Angevin vaulting, and behind the heavy chancel arch with its six groins, blazes a rich XVIth century altar of gilt wood. It is a very fine specimen of a rather complicated art, overloaded with decoration, but not lacking in old-fashioned charm. It must have produced a strange but sumptuous effect in the elegant choir of the Grand-Moustier, from which it has been torn away; and one would gladly see it back there again, with many other things now scattered in museums and churches, as far away as the gardens of the Préfecture of

Maine-et-Loire. One would also be glad if the imprisoned statues of the English sovereigns were restored to the place of honour which becomes them, in the heart of the church.

Montreuil-Bellay. — Fulk Nerra again ! It was he who founded the fortress and town; but nothing of his building is still standing. Ramparts of the XIIIth and XVth centuries run almost all the way round the town and are pierced by rough rusticated gateways. A high château, built by the d'Harcourt family, also in the XVth century, dominates the pretty valley of the Thouet. Nothing could be pleasanter than this hospitable little town. It has kept its picturesque streets, and has a taste for walks planted with trees. At its feet the Thouet encloses, as in a narrow sheath, the rich green of its leafy waters. Montreuil-Bellay is a place beloved of trees and birds, no doubt in honour of Toussenel, who was born there.

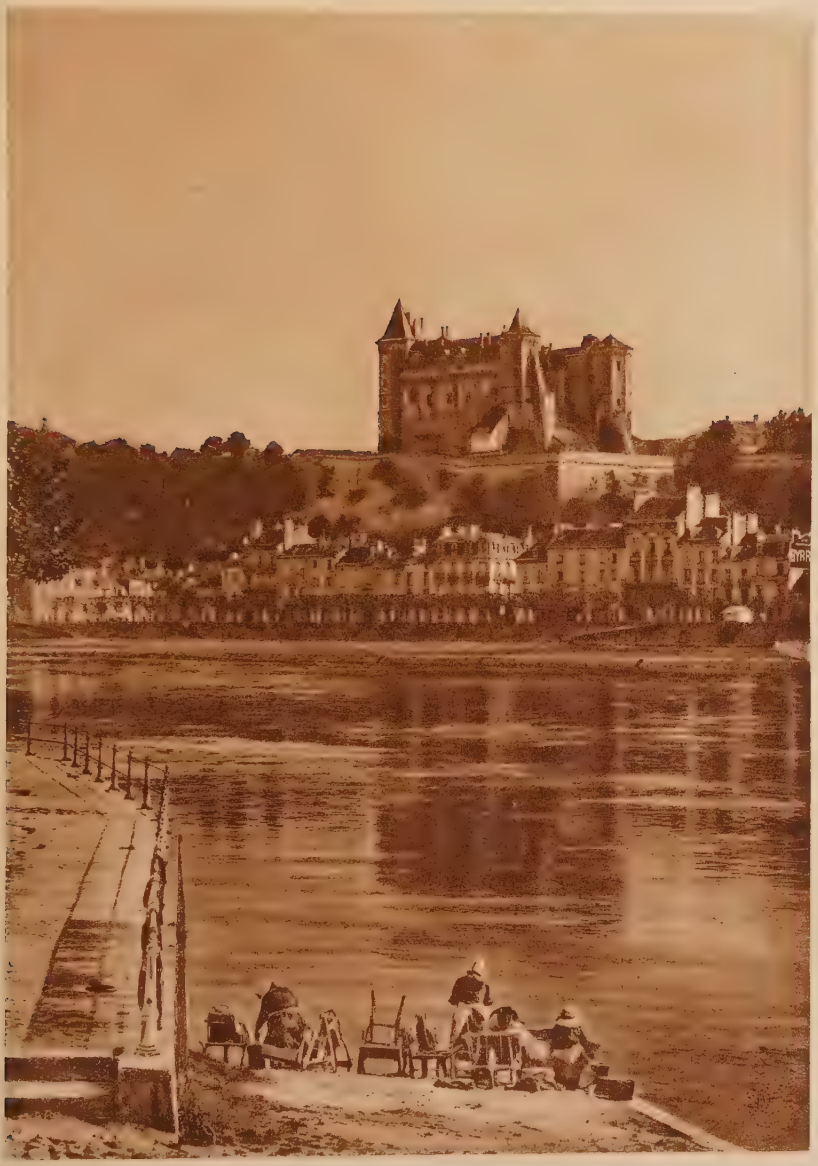
The entrance to the castle is grim; — a high fortification with pointed towers, darkened by great trees. But how charming is the inner courtyard ! On the left are two groups of buildings of a pleasingly irregular appearance : a little XVth century fortress with little towers, flanked by a stately mediaeval kitchen, with a central dome supported by four pillars, recalling the Tour d'Evrault which we have just seen. If Gargantua came here to taste his good neighbour's

Montreuil-Bellay. Fortified Gateway of the Château.

wines, he must have taken a joy in the sight of this great temple of good cheer. Opposite, the château, properly so-called, raises on high the six stories of its turret staircase, its gables, its pinnacles, its turrets and its chimney-stacks. This is no chill abode of an uneasy lord, but a smiling house all fragrant with an intimate charm. Before the steps a sunny terrace, formed by an ancient rampart walk, looks right down into the deep, cool valley of the Thouet. A charming grove of trees, and a kitchen garden, are tucked away close at hand, their entrance hidden by a brilliant rose-hedge.

The view from the terraces of Montreuil-Bellay is not very extensive, but how pleasant it is and restful to the spirit, enclosed in its narrow amphitheatre ! At our feet, ivy and briars clamber up the wall. The garden, through a breach opened in the wall, advances as it were to meet the river. In the valley-bottom, rounded bushes stoop to caress the water with their quivering leaves, and tall poplars stretch their arms to heaven. The Thouet, as it passes by, laves the little islands covered with weeds and willows; and on its surface gently rise and fall the water-lilies, water-weed and rushes. A great stone bridge seems to check the water in its

The Loire at Candes-Montsoreau.



Saumur.

course; and on the other bank rise yet more trees, but more sparsely, as if eager to give place to vineyards and cultivated lands.

On the banks of the Angevin Loire. — The Vienne empties itself into the Loire on the very border between Touraine and Anjou. At Candes, the last town in Touraine, died St. Martin, whose mortal remains were

Saumur. The Château and the Loire.

the object of a fierce quarrel between the people of Poitou and Touraine. The latter clung to their advantage and brought the precious relics back to Tours. Candes remained a place of pilgrimage, and a great basilica in the Plantagenet style displays to the faithful its fortress-like gate and its curious porch, of which the vaulting springs from a single slender column.

Entre Candes et Montsoreau,
Ne paît ni vache ni veau.

says the proverb (Neither cow nor calf grazes between Candes and Montsoreau). And indeed there is nothing to separate the two places, between which, on the banks of the Loire, at the very frontier of Anjou,

Saumur. Romanesque Doorway of the Church of Saint Pierre.

rise the high walls of the château of Montsoreau. It was once a very handsome dwelling-house, but time and the hand of man have outraged and mutilated it; and the present owner, the Department of Fine Arts, has great difficulty in preserving it from ruin. Its stones, they say, are suffering the punishment which Jean de Chambes, Count of Montsoreau, whom Alexandre Dumas has made into a hero of romantic melodrama, succeeded in escaping in the XVIth century, — cruel persecutor of the Protestants as he was. One would never be surprised if one saw, one stormy night, in its sinister and crumbling halls, the plaintive phantom of the Lady of Montsoreau.

The gloom of the poor, scarred building is still further deepened by the splendour of the waters in which it mirrors its disfigured façade. The Loire, which has just received the waters of the Vienne, spreads out in a broad loop, whose shallow waters form a sort of lake. Over it skims the little white sail of a child's toy boat. The passing wind ruffles its surface, making the willows wave and the poplars quiver. The breeze seems to flirt with the grey and blue houses ranged in tiers on the low hill; but one can almost hear it moaning through the gaping windows of the château, and blowing up the dust around the owls and bats who haunt the machicolations, or sleep clinging to the worm-eaten beams.

Slowly the Loire goes on its way amidst the verdure, past islands and sandy shores. Soon a double stone bridge crosses the two arms of the river, and along a long quay stretches a town dominated by a great bare castle : it is Saumur.

Although the town has preserved its ancient town-hall and old churches and houses, it has been on the whole opened up and modernised. The streets of the old quarter, with their flights of steps, have lost much

A Corner in Old Saumur.

of the picturesqueness made famous by Balzac; and yet a thousand trifles still tell us that Saumur is still the city of Eugénie Grandet's father. For Grandet really lived, under the name of Jean Niveleau; he was a great purchaser of national property. The marquisate of Froidfront, mentioned by Balzac, is simply Montreuil-Bellay, and its present owner is a nephew by marriage of Eugénie Grandet, who became the Baronne Millin de Grandmaison.

I arrived at Saumur on a day of public rejoicing. Down the streets, full of the flapping of flags and decorated with flowers, the population moved along in a leisurely way, almost in silence. One might almost think that the people of Saumur had preserved their stiff manners and air of reserve since the time, more than three hundred years ago, when their town was the centre of Protestantism. But how picturesque the crowd was! Saumur is of course in Anjou, but it is near Touraine and the Vendée; and the dolmens, cromlechs and menhirs in the neighbourhood tell us that Brittany is not far away. Curious spectators had come in from all these regions, and above all the women, with their caps flut-

Saumur. Gateway : rue Haute-Saint-Pierre.

tering in the wind or shining in the sun. Country-women dressed in full skirts with ample folds, their hair tightly bound in a flat

Saumur. Hôtel de Ville.

cap holding the hair fast, with a broad ribbon over it, running round the brow and tied at the back of the head; old peasant-women with their severe dress, all in black, wearing white lace caps trimmed with a cream silk ribbon; buxom, fresh-looking women of Anjou, with a pointed kerchief round their shoulders and a gold cross with arms of equal length shining at their neck, their hair loosely held by the great bow of their goffered caps; saucy fisherwomen from Les Sables, with the points of their light, stiff caps turning up like a snail's horns, and their slender legs moving briskly between the hem of their short skirts and their sabot-like shoes; heavily built Breton women, wearing their velvet bodices and white aprons, — their faces broadened by the arrangement of their hair, parted in the middle and drawn close to the head, and by their light, conical caps of starched lace. But these caps, these dresses and kerchiefs, belong to past days, and are lost in the indistinguishable crowd of cos-

Old Saumur. House of the King of Sicily.

tumes copied by provincial dressmakers from Paris models. And, alas ! it was not the former that were looked at by the men, — who were for the most part soldiers. For Saumur is the temple of the cavalry. Grooms from the Cavalry School, all pretentious in their black uniforms, heavy, loose-limbed dragoons or cuirassiers, the more lightly-built chasseurs or hussars, — who have a bolder way with the girls, — haughty spahis, their faces tattooed with their tribal marks, walking awkwardly in their voluminous brown uniforms.

The crowd was drawn up with patient curiosity to watch a dull mounted procession go by. There were few people at the windows : it must be considered improper at Saumur to go out on the balcony. On the other hand, the tables outside the cafés were thronged with curious spectators, exhilarated by the light wine, with a tang of gun-flint, which comes from the banks of the Loire between Montsoreau and Dampierre, or from the banks of the Thouet.

The rest of the town was almost deserted, and seemed curiously silent and dead, which made the dismal château even more melancholy. In the xvth century it was a fortress like Ussé, adorned with every fancy that a roof can suggest. Since then it has been turned into a barracks or a prison, and is cheerful no more. The battlements no longer exist, the

spires and pinnacles have turned into flat roofs, the pointed dormer-windows and tall chimneys have been levelled. But at any rate, it has been impossible to deprive it of its general impression of stately amplitude, and the town of Saumur, which has owned the château since the opening of the century, has made well-meaning efforts to restore and furnish it. In particular, it has set up a museum there in honour of the horse, together with the remarkable collections of ceramics and religious art bequeathed by Count Lair to his native town. But how much more precious is the landscape, as seen from the windows, or from the top of the highest tower! The town, seen as in a bird's eye view below the massive stone-work of the walls, is all blue with the blue of the slate roofs. The double course of the Loire is of a paler blue; the long island on which lies spread out the suburb of Les Ponts is of a brilliant green. Beyond is the glory of the open country shut in on the horizon by low hills. Trees and fields are so harmoniously disposed that the country seems like an immense English park, all green and blue. This is still the Varennes country, drained and fertilised by long *boires* running parallel with the river : the Grande Boire, the Changeon, the Boire des Roux, the B ire de l'Authion. On the other side the view is less extensive, but delight ' with its inviting woods. This is the valley of the Thouet, which falls into the Loire two miles from here. And the contrast between

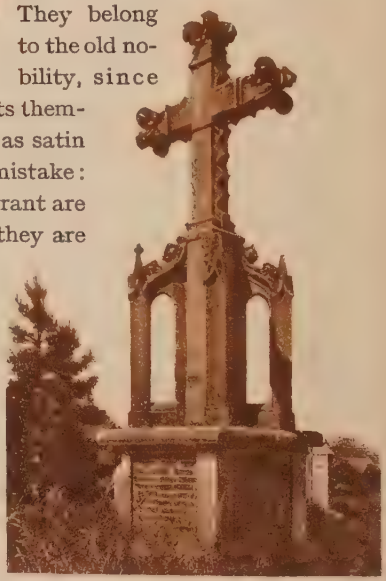
Château de Serrant.

Château de Serrant.

the little green river and the great yellowish stream is striking.

The wines of Anjou. — The part of Anjou which lies along the banks of the Loire is a country of wine and flowers. Is it surprising, then, that the men have been accused of drinking too much, and the women of being too anxious to please?

The wines of Anjou have done more for the fame of their land than the charms of nature or of art. They run in a triumphant series along both banks of the Loire and the right bank of the Layon. They belong to the old nobility, since it was bestowed on them by the Plantagenets themselves. They are as soft as velvet, as firm as satin and as light as a silky muslin. But make no mistake: Rablay, Quarts de Chaume or Coulée de Serrant are as strong as they are delicate. No doubt they are an integral part of that " sweetness of Anjou " dear to Joachim du Bellay, for, as Rabelais says, " the aroma of wine, how much more seductive, laughing and persuasive it is, (*friant, riant, priant*) more celestial and more delightful than oil ! " But when once the palate, throat and stomach have been caressed by this



Cross at Brissac.

Corner Tower of the Château of Angers.

Angers. Courtyard of Barrault's House.

sweetness, beware, bold wine-bibber, for it is better to go to bed than to try to reach the moon ! The good wine-growers of Anjou know this well, when they let you taste the different vintages of their *bouché* in their cellars, for they will tell you, as you go out, that it is better to go home on a barrow than on your feet.

If the wine of Soulaines will allow you, do not fail to salute the Château of Brissac as you pass. Do not accuse yourself of being... that which you fear you are, if you see that it has green towers; for they are covered with ivy. Do not imagine that the wine has clouded your vision, if you distinguish among these XIVth century towers a Louis XIII dwelling-house : for Marshal Cossé-Brissac would have it so.

After crossing the six bridges of Pont-de-Cé, you will certainly want to enjoy the local Barbillon, washed down by a full-bodied wine of Murs. But walk with a firm tread, for as you cross the bridge on which dreams Dumnacus, the Gaulish hero, the wind may easily carry off your hat. Keep your eyes wide open, or you may run up against the castle without seeing it.

And if by any chance you go to Trélazé, you must visit the slate-

quarries before tasting the old Saint-Barthélemy. I should not like to see you slip down a quarry and suddenly break off your round of the vintages of Anjou.

You will also wish to taste the Coulée de Serrant at Saint-Georges-sur-Loire. At least, it is there that you can first drink of this liquid gold. The calm and regular plan of the Château of Serrant will restore your equilibrium; and on the edge of the great lake which stretches up to the harmonious garden front, you will perhaps repent a little, and say to yourself that, after all, there is some good in water, if it can add such subtle and moving charm to a sumptuous house.

Angers. — Some travellers like to sum up in one word the general impression left upon them by a place. It is a convenient habit, but difficult of application, for the word chosen has to represent at once the external aspect of the town, the character of its inhabitants, and the essential feature of its activities. Moreover, this synthetic definition is altogether subjective, changing according to the cast of mind, the general culture and the profession of the person who makes it. Let us try this method, none the less, for it seems to me that it can be applied here rather happily.

Angers. Old Moats of the Château.

Angers Museum. The David Gallery.

Angers is a grey city. Grey in virtue of its damp atmosphere, — for the Maine is formed almost directly beneath its walls by the confluence of the Loir, the Sarthe and the Mayenne; while the Loire is quite near, and the sea is not far off. It is grey in its general range of colour, made up of a mixture of stone and slate. Finally it is grey in many of its more intimate aspects : a population which does not hurry or gesticulate or make demonstrations, a general disposition whose somewhat shadowy outer life one divines rather than clearly perceives. But it seems to me that this impression arises chiefly from the fact that here we are in a land which forms a transition between Brittany and Touraine, and that its disposition partakes of both temperaments, uniting Breton melancholy and tenacity with the light-hearted gaiety of Touraine.

In this city where slaty schist is mingled with white limestone, a few beautiful buildings stand out here and there, choice pieces in an enormous collection. None of them is intact, some are in ruins, none is perfect. They leave on one's mind an impression as of things which one is sad to see spoilt and too much altered; but also the subtle pleasure of finding in such living form the trace of the centuries which have modified them.

Angers. Gateway of the Maison d'Adam.

The enormous château, built by Philip Augustus and St. Louis, has lost its ancient pride since the days of Henry III. It is a dismantled mass flanked by seventeen great round towers. The blind walls are austere and melancholy, of a harsh and imposing character, still further increased by the charm of the gardens planted in the ancient moat. It seems as if the towers with their broad bases, like an elephant's feet, were crushing the rose-bushes; nature in turn takes her revenge, for climbing rose-trees cling to the glacis and a Virginia creeper scales one of the towers.

In the heart of the town, the cathedral of Saint Maurice points heavenwards its too finely tapered spires, between which rises a too heavy lantern-tower. But we soon forget all this, and even the eight bad statues on the façade, as soon as we find ourselves in the presence of the very fine Romanesque doorway with its four deep groins, opening on to the single stately nave, with the broad domical vaulting of Angevin Gothic. To tell the truth, I have retained no impression of this immense church save one of general grandeur, for

Angers. The Maison d'Adam.

David. The Child with the Grapes.

all my attention was at once irresistibly attracted by the splendid series of ancient tapestries, in fifty-three panels, which hang all round the nave beneath the windows. It was an unforgettable vision of these vast decorative designs, on a background of red or blue, with great conventional figures and strange flowers, representing scenes from the Apocalypse, soaring angels bearing the instruments of Christ's Passion, Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons, or the Lady of Rohan playing the organ. This unique collection, which is usually exhibited in the ancient episcopal palace, had been brought out perhaps for a few days, in honour of some great ceremony; but it is so well suited for mural decoration that it seemed an integral part of the edifice itself. Happy the artists who could adapt their work to its purpose with such a sure hand!

Other monuments and other collections solicit the visitor's attention; but the curious cloister in the court-yard of the Préfecture, the ruined church in the Rue Toussaint, the imposing Tower of Saint-Aubin, the church of Saint-Serge, whose Angevin vaultings droop like bats' wings, the restored church of the Trinity, and the neighbouring church of Ronceray, the old Archaeological Museum, — even the House of Adam with its pure style, cannot make one forget the enchanting effect of these splendid tapestries. For their sake alone one would gladly return time after time.

And yet the Museum, housed in a grim, austere building, which was first the private dwelling-house of Olivier Barrault, treasurer of Brittany at the end of the xvth century, then the residence of the governors of Anjou, and afterwards, in the xviith century, a great seminary and prison, is not without merit. It contains, in particular, either in the original or in casts, the enormous but unequal output of the greatest of Angevin artists, David d'Angers. And let us not forget the valuable collections

in the charming Hotel Pincé, where Clouet, Rubens, Rembrandt, Velasquez, Goya are to be found side by side with the old Japanese masters Hokusai, Utamaro, Harunobu, Surimono and Hiroshige.

This grey city contains many treasures, surrounded by a rich setting of beautiful promenades. The ancient fortifications have given place to wide, leafy boulevards; the pleasantest of these, the Boulevard de Saumur, leads to the Garden of the Mail, a perfect expression of the temperament of Anjou, smiling and prettily formal. Around a huge and sumptuous pool, masses of spindle-trees with green and yellow leaves bear witness to the serious character of Anjou, without any great flights of imagination; but on all sides are poured forth countless masses of flowers, showing, in their turn, that smiling grace which also characterises it.

In Anjou. — Our tour finishes in the valley of the Loir but let us stay a little longer on the banks of the Angevin Loire — one lingers so willingly in a country that one loves. For my part, I would choose the wooded region south of the river, between Saumur and Saint-Sulpice, or some corner of the winding valley of the Layon, enhanced by the bouquet of its wines, or again the country which stretches between the Maine and the Loire. Below Pont-de-Cé the river changes its appearance, its bed grows considerably wider; downstream from Savennières it is over a mile wide and its numerous branches wind past islands where the grey green of the willows alternates with the pale gold of the sand. The trees are not so tall as in Touraine, the valleys less moist but nature is more energetic and the keen air, telling of the nearness of the sea, quickens the blood and cools the brow of the traveller.

Angers Museum.
The Reading Lesson.

On leaving Angers, gladly did I rejoin the valley of the Loir by the shortest route, so pleasantly does the road, which follows the Maine and the Loire up to Saint-Georges in picturesque variation, wind along the cliff.

And I arranged to reach this pretty village

at lunch time in order to enjoy the famous pike "au beurre blanc", washed down with a royal *Coulée de Serrant* at the old village inn, the Tête Noire.

The châteaux here are perhaps less numerous than in the heart of Touraine but Serrant at least can bear comparison with the most famous. It is a sumptuous building which has not been overloaded with Renaissance sculptures or pilasters. Two towers with cupolas give it a seigniorial appearance and at the cornice three windows joined together, surmounted by a triangular pediment, break the monotony of a well proportioned roof.

After leaving Serrant, let us make for the valley of the Loir across gently undulating country, intersected by hedges and trees, which in Vendée would be called a *bocage*. Having passed the Mayenne with its low banks covered with willows, thick bushes and oaks, we will make a détour in order to have a look at the château of Plessis-Bourré. To the left of an avenue of tall trees, not far from the road, the old manor-house, which was built towards the end of the xvth century, mirrors in its wide moat its picturesque variety of white walls, immense roof and towers.

Angers. Tapestry representing Scene from the Apocalypse.

The Loir at Durtal.

CHAPTER V

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The Banks of the Loir

The Lower Valley. — The Loir is like a more sluggish Indre, more winding and more weedy. Like the Indre, it generously fills its bed, caresses the rushes and water-lilies, and adorns its banks with verdure and flowers. It also works; for its busy banks often echo with the clatter of mills, and at times reek of the neighbouring tanneries.

Before falling into the Sarthe, the river dawdles along, meandering at large in a broad valley, from the edge of which occasionally rises a low-lying hill.

At Durtal, only two things attract the eye : the river and the château. Apart from these, the houses seem so small that one can hardly see them. The river flows along past the old ruined fortifications, and checks itself on the edge of the weirs, and a buzz goes up from saw-mills and tanneries. The poplars quiver like the water in which they are reflected, and the

willows make a silver splash upon the sombre masses of low trees. Not far from the river, the imposing light brown mass of a château seems to bar the way. An eye to symmetry influenced its construction, and the bricks of which it is built, broken by stone courses, date from the time at which it was erected, under the reigns of Henry IV and Louis XIII. It was built by the Schomberg family, who became lords of Durtal by marriage, but a few buildings bear witness to a more ancient history; for example, the great tower with heavy machicolations and a pointed roof, to which the xvth century added crenellations.

A few miles upstream, the town of La Flèche presents quite a different character : it represents, to my eyes, the perfect type of a little *Sous-préfecture*. Its narrow streets are melancholy, and its activity seems to be entirely confined to the Place Henri IV. At the edge of the *place* stands a church. A poor statue has been erected there, and on market-days a fungus-like activity is momentarily imported by the peasants of the neighbourhood.

Durtal. An old Tower. The Presbytery.

The Prytanée Militaire presents its front to the town, but behind it stretches away a beautiful park. It was in the first place a pleasure-house of the Prince of Bourbon; but in 1603 Henry IV gave it to the Jesuits for a college. The establishment was entirely rebuilt between 1620 and 1653, in a style bear-

The Banks of the Sarthe near Plessis-Bourré.

ing the impress of the Society of Jesus. Houses built by the Jesuits bear the mark of the Order itself indelibly stamped upon them : regular discipline, a tempered austerity, an indefinable melancholy. The old colleges of the Fathers have an atmosphere of propriety and well-bred politeness; but the grace and fancy characterising the spirit of the age are replaced by a chilly style of architecture, in which one somehow feels the stir of a force, mysterious and sure of itself. Nothing can be more like a barracks, but let there be no mistake : military barracks have no soul; they bear none but the material traces of the rough men who have lived in them, and of the vulgar leaders who have made themselves obeyed by force. In the Jesuit barracks the spirit of the Society floats for ever, inflexible, but tempered by an exquisite politeness; conventional, but boiling with passion for the triumph of a single cause, that of the Papacy.

The college of La Flèche bore its destiny so clearly written upon its very fabric, that in 1764, two years after the expulsion of the Jesuits, Choiseul turned it into a barrack-school, in which two hundred and fifty sons of noblemen learnt, with the art of war, Latin, French, history,

Château du Lude. South Front and Gardens.

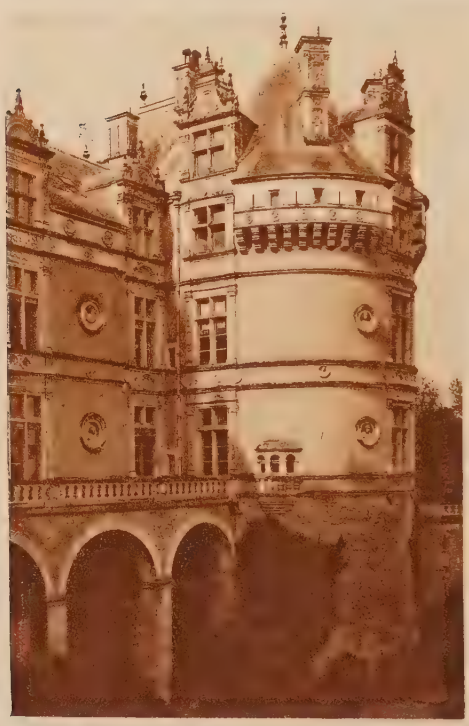
geography, mathematics and drawing. In 1776 Louis XVI gave back to the Fathers the house in which had been nurtured the genius of René Descartes. It was closed in 1793, but came to life again in 1806, and since that time, under the name of the Prytanée Militaire, it has become a preparatory school for entrance into the Military School of Saint-Cyr. In the huge, bright nave of its spacious chapel kneel the boy soldiers, and the somewhat crude colouring of their red trousers and blue tunics harmonises well with the clear-cut coldness of the black, white and red marbles.

Gardens of Le Lude. A Marble Vase.

Le Lude. — Thirteen miles from La Flèche, one might imagine that one had been transported into another country, so gay and smiling is the little town of Le Lude. It hides, rather than displays, one of the finest châteaux in France.

The Loir at Le Lude.

The castle was planned in 1470 by a most strange personnage, Jean de Daillon. He was a sly rogue, whom Louis XI, who ought to have been a judge, nicknamed " Master John of the cunning tricks " *(Maître Jehan des Habiletés)*. He was at first persecuted by Louis XI, whom he had betrayed when Dauphin, but ended by winning his good graces, and died, for from his home, at Roussillon (Isère), as governor of Dauphiné.



Le Lude. Turret in the South-east corner.

The château of Le Lude is a sort of architectural kaleidoscope : it varies in appearance according to the point of view. Purely feudal in its plan and foundations, it is a vast square dwelling-house, flanked at each corner by enormous round towers. Its northern façade, looking towards the town, is of the XVth century. On one of the towers are carved the porcupine of Louis XII and the twisted cord of Anne of Brittany. A great niche in the wall of the house contains the statue of Jean de Daillon. The west front (in which is situated the entrance of the château), and the south front, were planned in the XVIth century. The southern one, in particular, which looks over the park, is harmoniously proportioned, achieving beauty by its simplicity : the architects have pierced the walls and towers of the fortress with elegant windows, turned the rampart walk into a closed gallery (as at Azay-le-Rideau), and brightened the gently-sloping roofs with pointed dormer-windows and high chimneys.

Between the windows, great round medallions have been sunk in the walls. On the ground floor, a terrace supported by arcades runs from tower to tower. That is all, but it succeeds in composing as harmonious a whole as could possibly be found. And the pretty back façade of the château, in the Louis XVI style, which would be the pride of any other house, seems almost poor here. Inside the château, I prefer the court of honour built in the time of Henry IV, when architecture had an all too brief period of charming production.

Le Lude. North Front.

The Marquis de Talhouët, the present owner of Le Lude, has arranged his beautiful house richly and tastefully; but I envy him, above all, his garden and park, which are among the finest in the world. Before the south front stretches a wide terrace, closed on the river side by a stately stone balustrade. It is laid out as a garden in the French style: around its great lawns are bright masses of flowers, relieved at regular intervals by clipped spindle-trees. From time to time appears a white marble vase; but above all, this fine parterre is set off by the most perfect frame. On one side, the well-proportioned façade of the château; on the right, the magnificent servants' wing seen through trees; opposite us, the deep masses of foliage in the park; and on the left, beyond the balustrade, the lovely Loir with its green waters, its bed filled with long rushes, which quiver with the motion of the water. It

emerges from a lofty grotto of verdure, then, at the foot of a long, narrow flower-bed running below the terrace, it waters the broad pasture-lands, dotted with groups of trees, among which fly bands of chattering starlings. Nature has been disciplined, it is true, but with such skill and moderation! The verdure lends the flowers a brilliancy which they do not possess elsewhere; and the balustrade edging the ter-

Manoir de la Poissonnière.

race, which is framed to right and left by high trees, seems to open on an infinite horizon. And yet the little bluish hill which closes the valley is not far away.

At the house of Ronsard. — Beyond Le Lude, the banks of the Loir grow more varied. The road winds up and down hill as far as Château-du-Loir. Near the water, the valley slopes gently as a rule. But at times the road is edged by low limestone cliffs, full of troglodyte dwellings — to a large extent deserted — and cellars. Nature has resumed her sway. Ash-trees and other young growths, creepers and weeds crowd round the foot of the cliff and choke the entrance to the deserted grottoes. The brimming

Loir flows past with its little green islands, its reeds and rushes, with now and then some water-lilies near the shore.

It is the "whispering shore" *(parlante rive)* dear to Ronsard,

> Le Loir, tard à la fuite
> En soi s'esbanoyant.

(The Loir, slow in its flight and sporting with itself), the "wicked Loir" which dared one day to overturn the poet's boat and sully with its slime him who had "so often sung its glory and its praise."

Church of Couture.

A little beyond the white château of Poncé, sleeping among the trees, a bridge to the right of the road spans the two banks and leads us towards Couture, a poor village, grouped round a modest church, the ancient parts of which are almost lost in the alterations made in the XVIIth century. Here were buried Louis de Ronsard and Jeanne de Chauldrier, the father and mother of Pierre de Ronsard, and the statues on their tombs still kneel in prayer at the end of the nave. And the church opens to the stars at the memory of the great poet's baptism. The house where he was born is a few yards away, and legend relates how, on the way from the manor-house to the church, in the meadow of Bouju, the woman who carried the baby let him fall. But the child was hardly hurt at all, for he fell upon flowers. They must have been wild

Couture. Tomb of Ronsard's Parents.

La Poissonnière. Doorway of the Chapel.

marjoram, for at that season this flowering herb adorns the edge of the road, the ditches and meadows on every side.

In front of us La Poissonnière, the manor which formed the patrimony of the Ronsard family, raises its simple white façade, modern but in the Renaissance style. The life of the house goes on at the other side, on the courtyard. It is a modest one-storeyed dwelling, about contemporary with the poet, with mullioned windows decorated in the Italian style. It has nothing lordly about it but its octagonal tower enclosing the staircase. On the pediment of the ornate dormer-window which lights the roof are carved the arms of the Ronsards : azure, three fishes argent. Beside the house, at right angles to it, considerable out-buildings give to the whole place the appearance of a large, comfortable farm rather than a nobleman's dwelling. And indeed the interest we feel in these regions does not centre in this house. Ronsard was born in this place; but the property has no doubt changed greatly since his birth, and besides, it never belonged to the poet, but was inherited by his eldest brother. Ronsard's real house is no mass of stones more or less harmoniously ordered, but this whole valley, which formed the approach to his poetic works. As a child he wandered through the sacred precincts of the pretty meadows lying round about, and bent over the limpid basin of the fountain of Bellerie or the dark mirror of the river; and so clearly did he perceive beneath the trees the spirit of nature, that his genius was steeped in it for ever. Beneath the Greek and Latin ornaments, then in fashion, his Muse remained a beautiful French country-girl :

> " Tantost en un village et tantost en un bois,
> Et tantost par les lieux solitaires et cois. "

(Now in a village and now in a wood,
Now in the still and solitary places).

in the " pleasant and serene " noon-tide, she won him towards earthly " loves " :

" J'aime fort les jardins qui sentent le sauvage,
J'aime le flot de l'eau qui gazouille au rivage,
... Je dis le mot pour rire, et, à la vérité,
Je ne loge chez moi trop de sévérité ...
... J'aime à faire l'amour, j'aime à parler aux femmes,
A mettre par écrit mes amoureuses flammes.
J'aime le bal, la danse, et les masques aussi ..."

(I dearly love the gardens with their wild fragrance
I love the flowing stream which babbles by its banks.
I love a merry jest and, if the truth be told,
Austerity is not a favourite guest with me.
... I am fond of making love and talking to the ladies,
And love to put my amorous adventures into verse.
I love balls and the dance and masques as well...).

This pleasure-lover was, however, a good Christian, and what is more, a good cleric, for he was a priest, possessed of ecclesiastical benefices, since poetry could not support its devotees in the XVIth century any more than at other times. He was prior of Saint Gilles, near Montoire-sur-le-Loir, and also of Saint-Côme-les-Tours, where he died. This priory of

Trôo. House of Cave Dwellers.

Saint-Côme, built in the very bed of the Loire, has been turned into a farm. Cabbages, salad and leeks now grow all round the disused and dilapidated chapel. I do not know whether Ronsard would have appreciated this irony of fate. But we, who have learnt in the course of this tour how changeable is the destiny of houses built by man, prefer to look for the memory of poets in nature alone; and we think of Ronsard on the bank of his river, near the bridge of Couture.

" Quelqu'un après mille ans, de mes vers estonné,
Voudra dedans mon Loir, comme en Permesse boire,
Et voyant mon pays, à peine pourra croire
Que d'un si petit lieu tel poète soit né.

(Some after a thousand years, amazed at my verse,
Will desire to drink of my Loir, as if it were Parnassus,
And looking on my land, will hardly manage to believe
That such a poet should have been born in such a little place).

In the Ruins of the Château of Lavardin.

Three picturesque hills. — Above Couture, the Loir encircles with its waters some modest hills, which lend the valley a certain variety and element of the unexpected. Trôo, which is the first we come to, rises in a pyramid on the slope of a steeply inclined plateau. The rich meadows through which the river winds form, as it were, a pedestal of light to the hill. In the limestone cliff open strange but comfortable troglodyte dwellings, cellars, grottoes and galleries. Above these rise masses of cool verdure, and cottages are dotted

The Loir near Trôo.

about among the orchards. Finally, on the edge of the plateau, an ancient fortified village, or ferté, encloses within its ruined fortifications an almost perished abbey, of which all that remains are a few damaged walls, an old well with a curious echo, and a mighty unfinished church, in a transitional Romanesque style, which has great breadth and grandeur. From thence the whole country lies invitingly open before the eyes, with its golden corn-fields studded with trees and, along the valley, meadows varied by willows and poplars. One should walk up to the church of Trôo when the day is declining. The meadows are flooded with an intenser yellow in the sunlight, every tree seems to wear a halo round its head, and, towards the horizon, in the light mist rising from the river, the Keep of Lavardin rises into a sky which is still blue. As we return, let us glance at the rough, simple statue of a local holy man, Saint-Mémé, whose modest miracles do not soar higher than the bowels; for he heals colic. And let us remember the words of Gregory of Tours in glorification of St. Martin : " O splendid antidote ! Renowned purgative ! Above all the skill of doctors, softer than aromatics, stronger than all the unguents in the world put together ! "

Let us go on, this same fine evening, to Montoire. The twilight peace adds still greater spaciousness to the huge *place* of this town, smiling, but a little monotonous in appearance. As the shadows fall, they lend stateliness to the noble yet simple Renaissance house of the painter Charles Busson, and wrap in mystery the naive frescoes of the little chapel in the ancient monastery of Saint-Gilles, which Ronsard held as commendatory prior. And finally, on the very edge of the plateau, commanding the valley, we will go at nightfall and sit at the foot of the ruined walls of what was once the feudal castle of Montoire. Within this wall, where one can almost see a cloud of dust floating everlastingly, the evening is all grey, with a sad bluish grey which seems to have absorbed the souls of the hulking veterans who fought here. And we feel in our own soul the still ineradicable roots of a dead romanticism, for, almost instinctively, verses of Heinrich Heine and Victor Hugo come into our minds.

Ruins of the Château of Lavardin.

Next day we are to climb a third hillside, also crowned with a ruined feudal castle. It is in broad daylight that we shall wander

The Loir at Lavardin.

Church of Trôo. Saint Mémé.

curiously round the Keep of Lavardin. This ruin is the work of man, for it was in 1590 that the Prince of Condé, fighting for Henry IV, dislodged the Protestants, and, by the King's orders, dismantled their stronghold. The fortress has resigned itself unwillingly to dissolution; for such is the solidity with which it was built, that some parts of it still seem new, so perfectly constructed and fitted was the stonework. There is one tower, cut in half by the destroyers, that has even refused to moulder away, but lies there on its side; and the huge half-cylinder still remains almost intact, sloping down towards the inside of the castle.

This splendid mass was built by soldiers and destroyed by soldiers; and our vacillating minds hardly know whether to admire war, which called forth such a magnificently co-ordinated whole, or curse the career of arms, which caused such an irremediable disaster. Lavardin has certainly been one of the finest examples of feudal military archi-

Vendôme. Hôtel de Ville.

Vendôme. Woodwork in the Choir of the Trinity Church.

tecture. Less powerful than Coucy, it was more elegant, owing to the lofty height of its walls. It is less grandly situated than Château Gaillard, but above the gracious valley of the Loir bloomed its trefoiled machicolations, its elegant dwelling-house and richly decorated apartments.

Lavardin remains, in fact, one of the most colossal piles of superincumbent buildings that can possibly be seen. It was built above the precipitous sides of a spur which commands the valley. Four landings, as it were, of a gigantic staircase, rise one above the other from the village up to the Keep. About the middle, at the level of the third enceinte, the entrance to the castle, defended by a fortified gate, opened on to a great esplanade. From there, crossing a narrow ravine which cuts into the edge of the plateau, a high drawbridge used to give access to the

Ruins of the Château of Vendôme.

only way of approach, a road made at the very foot of the limestone cliff, at the top of a conical mound of fallen rocks covered with a thick growth of trees. Not far from this work, in a round tower, opened an elegant door topped with an elliptical arch, surmounted by a gable enclosing a now undecipherable escutcheon. Inside the tower a magnificent broad staircase led up to the apartments of the lord, who was, for nearly the whole duration of the castle's existence, a Duke of Bourbon-Vendôme. The family arms still adorn the doorway of the keep, the last stronghold of the castle's defenders. On the side looking towards the plateau, the keep was defended by a further double enceinte, a deep moat, and, some distance away in the plain, by a strong barbican.

The ruin is certainly not dead, and it is not gloomy, but a touch of melancholy rises above the swirl of transparent mist which rolls along the valley-bottom of the Loir. The river, moreover, cannot be forgotten, as we look down from the lofty keep, for it fills the whole landscape. Not that it is very visible, for it is not very wide here, and is often hidden among the poplars. But it is the sole *raison d'être* of the rich meadows, the rows and groups of trees, and lastly, of the perpendicular cliff which winds away before us towards Thoré and Le Gué-du-Loir.

Vendôme. The Presbytery.

Vendôme. View from the Château.

Below us, the little village spreads out its roofs, and an old church displays its structure, consisting of a big tower at the entrance, a fairly long nave with aisles, a choir somewhat lower than the nave, and a round apse. We shall not fail to go and visit this church on leaving the castle. A notice put up by the parish priest informs us that it is a poor parish; and this is obvious. The walls are bare, only the windows and the arches enclosing the choir are framed in archaic carvings. But from place to place appear traces of fine Romanesque frescoes, with vigorous colouring and fine simple lines, which the worldly would call naive and primitive, but which are, on the contrary, the expression of a decorative and often very refined art.

Vendôme. — Vendôme is a quiet, blessed little town, sleeping like a *loir* (dormouse) on the banks of the river, which merits this name. The people are courteous and hospitable, but discreet and without fuss.

The slow-flowing Loir dawdles by and seems to be the very soul of the town, for one comes upon it everywhere, ramifying in every direc-

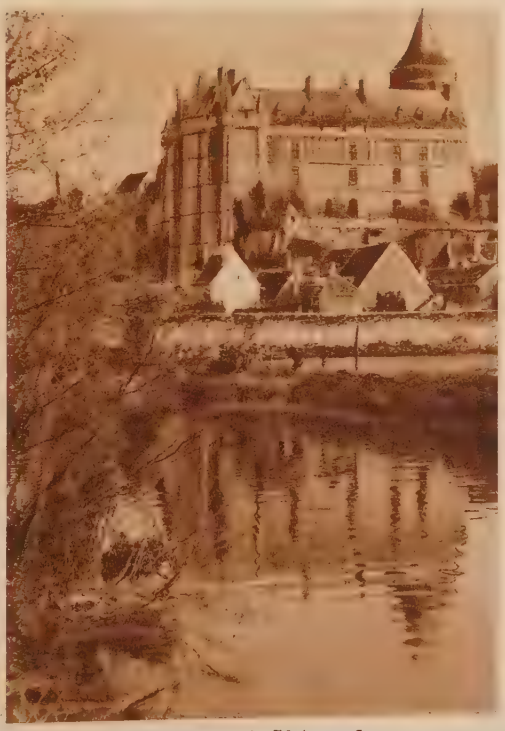
Vendôme. Façade of the Trinity.

tion in a number of arms and canals. The château, ruined by Henry IV, is deserted, enclosing a pleasant, though somewhat neglected promenade. All round the city, the soft country, strewn with green, woos one to sleep and soft repose. The very sky encourages the general impression, for it is tinged with a soft and listless light.

Vendôme has the old-fashioned charm of those cities which have preserved many traces of their history. Here and there rise the remains of the ancient ramparts. The houses and ancient churches dream where they happen to stand along the streets. The elegant town-hall was one of the city gates in the XVth century. The stately *lycée* was built in the XVIIth century by the Oratorians. Mascaron taught there, and Balzac, when a schoolboy, would lean over the banks of the Loir under the plane-trees of the park, which were venerable even in his day. But the wonder of Vendôme is the church of La Trinité. Around it, in former days, stretched a great abbey, the origin of which is curious : one evening, in 1035, Geoffroi Martel, son of Fulk Nerra, lord of Vendôme, and his wife Agnes, saw a will-o'-the-wisp dancing and settling not far from the banks of the river, which alarmed them greatly. In remission of their sins, they founded an abbey, dedicated to the Holy Trinity. The memory of this mysterious flame has left a living trace on the very front of the church, whose flames

of stone — *soufflets* and *mouchettes*, the archaeologists call them — curl above the doors, melt into one another at the points of the gables, run along the galleries, into the heart of the windows and over the balustrades. Inside, the church is less florid; only certain added details recall the flaming Flamboyant style of the front. The first four bays of the nave are, indeed, of the XVth century; but the next four are of the XIVth, and the transept is of the same period, with Romanesque portions. Finally, the choir is of the XIIIth century, so that La Trinité gives us an excellent lesson in the French religious architecture of the Middle Ages. This lesson in architecture is completed by lessons in sculpture and decoration: the church is rich in its stalls, its chancel gate, its retables and its statues. In one of the chapels surrounding the choir a splendid window of the XIIth century blazes with a crowned Virgin in an oval nimbus, holding on her knees the infant Jesus. In spite of this diversity of artists and periods, the old abbey church forms an *ensemble* of incomparable harmony. The art of the Benedictines, a subtle mixture of piety, elegance and high culture, is expressed here with a perfection attained by few monastic sanctuaries.

Close to the church the bell-tower, a still more perfect work of art, raises its powerful, but at the same time graceful form. The artists who planned it in the middle of the XIIth century gave it



Château of Châteaudun.

Sainte Madeleine.

lightness by leaving the lower portions almost entirely devoid of openings, but piercing the last storey of the square tower and the first octagonal storey with an abundance of windows; thus the structure insensibly gains in lightness, achieves an elegant slenderness and raises heavenward one of the most splendid spires in existence. An old Gothic bell hides within it; in its fine, grave note, the soul of the Benedictine order once more sets aquiver the silence of the little town and vibrates in the upper air like an eternal prayer.

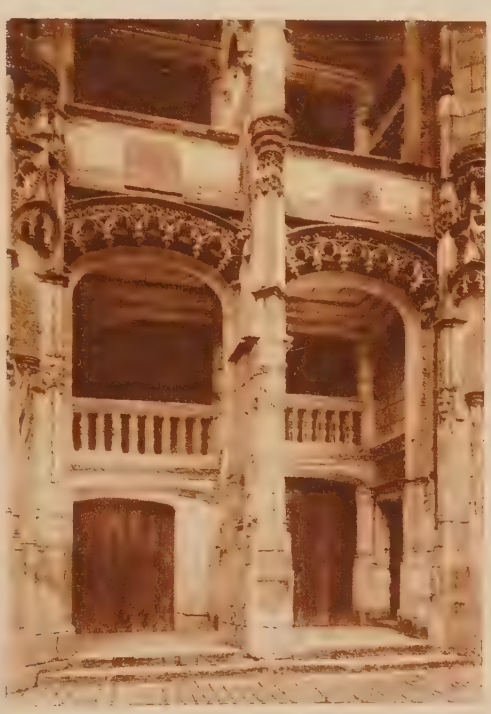
Châteaudun. — It is astonishing that, with such an ancient name, Châteaudun should be planned like a new city, with streets crossing each other at right angles and arranged on a geometrical plan. The reason is that it was almost entirely burnt down by an accident in 1723, and rebuilt according to the plans of the architect Hardouin. Hardly anything is left even of this period, for on October 15, 1870, the city, in the course of its noble defence against the Germans, was sacked and once more burnt. Of the town whose lord was Jean, Count of Longueville and Dunois, the famous "Bastard of Orleans", and companion of Joan of Arc, nothing is left save a few old houses and the enormous castle of the Counts of Dunois.

We must first look at this imposing house from outside, and particularly from the banks of the Loir. Its mighty courses face the chalky side of the plateau with good stone and descend into the depths of the valley. Above this the walls and the strong but elegant buttresses rise to a giddy height, bearing on high the picturesque

Châteaudun.
The Sainte Chapelle and the Donjon.

machicolations surmounted by gloomy battlements, pepper-pot turrets and a high-pitched roof with dormer-windows and great chimney-stacks.

Seen from the inner court, the castle is much less impressive. But its two one-storey main buildings, set at right angles to one another, do not lack a kind of sober elegance, enhanced, in the right wing, by two staircases. One of these, towards the centre of the façade, blooms with the grace of the early Renaissance, with its forms still inspired by Gothic traditions. The other, towards the angle formed by the two buildings, is ensconced between buttresses loaded with niches, crockets and pinnacles of the Flamboyant period. Opposite us, the dwelling-house of Dunois extends its harsh grey front with carved dormer-windows. To the left rises a pretty miniature church with a little gem of a square tower, made tinier still by contrast with an enormous bare keep of the XIIth century, almost entirely covered by a heavy mantle of dark ivy.



Châteaudun. Renaissance Staircase.

The little church — the Sainte-Chapelle — with its graceful Gothic arches, seems smiling and gay by contrast. It at least is inhabited, by things more living and more lovely than life : a collection of fifteen stone statues, formerly painted, poised on brackets all round the church, welcomes the visitor, who is at once impressed and charmed by the mysterious radiance emanating from all fine works of art. These statues were not all

carved by the same chisel, but they are all of the time of Louis XI : St. Agnes, in spite of the charming woolly lamb which she is caressing, has a stiff robe and great clumsy hands. But the Virgin with the Child is maternal and sweetly human, and Saint Magdalen, with the great folds of her ample cloak, in the style of Claus Sluter, is a marvel of grace and delicacy. Her hair pours down in great waves over her shoulders and arms, her delicate hands raise the lid of the box of precious ointment, and below the edge of the cloak can be seen a glimpse of a delicate bare foot. Side by side with these saints, Dunois, accoutred in his plate-armour and with his sword at his side, seems like some calm and faithful guardian, even as his house stands guard over the valley.

For us, this is the last melancholy stage, which closes the gate of the Garden. It is only the pretty Loir which has brought us here, as far as Châteaudun, for we are no longer in Touraine. Beyond its narrow valley extends the Beauce with its wide plains and large houses. A few miles more, and we catch sight of the towers of Chartres Cathedral, a glorious milestone on the road to Paris.

Château of Montigny-le-Gannelon.

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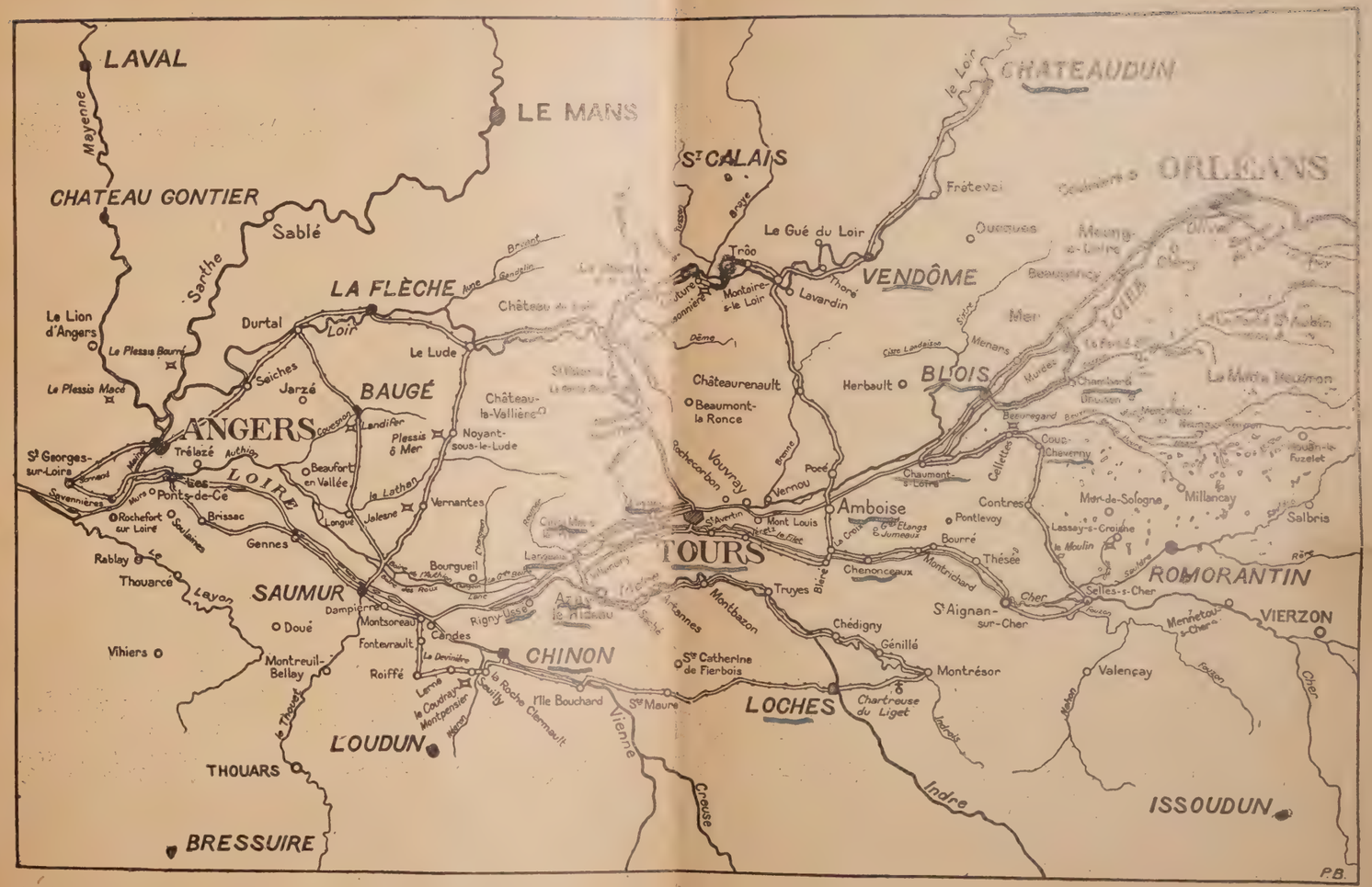

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